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THE MILDMAYES

OR

THE CLERGYMAN'S SECRET.

THE MILDMAYES

OR

THE CLERGYMAN'S SECRET

A Story of Twenty Years Ago.

BY

DANBY NORTH.

"What hath come to thee? In thy hollow eye,
"And hueless cheek, and thine unquiet motions,
"Sorrow, and shame, and conscience seem at war
"To waste thee."

BYRON'S *Marino Faliero.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE MILDMAYES;

OR,

THE CLERGYMAN'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

"HA! Caroline Mildmaye," cried Lady Rockforest, "so you have got out of your chamber! I did not intend to visit you until to-morrow morning, and I suppose that you were trying to escape from my clutches. But it shall not be so."

"Oh! Lady Rockforest, what have I ever done that you should outrage me thus? Oh! tell me if I have wronged you in word or deed, and do not——"

The words were cut short by a sudden

and most alarming fit of coughing seizing Lady Rockforest. Her thin form was convulsed with fearful spasms; she seemed as if every moment she would be choked; the lamp shook in her hand.

"Ha! ugh! ugh! the plague take this infernal death-cough. Ugh! ugh! It is what I call my charnel-house catarrh! Ha! ha! No doctor can cure this cold. Ugh! Come, girl, we must get out of this cold place—into my chamber you must come. Ugh! ugh!"

And seizing Caroline with a wiry, tenacious grasp, Lady Rockforest dragged her with considerable force across a wide lobby. She opened a door and entered into a large chamber, filled apparently with rubbish and miscellaneous articles, and which was uncarpeted. Inside it was another room, and the sight of a blazing coal fire could be caught from outside.

"Yes! you shall come in here, Miss Runaway," said Lady Rockforest. "I suppose that you thought that you could steal away without being caught. Come, you need not be so dreadfully frightened: I am not going to murder you."

Caroline certainly at the moment had every apprehension that some act of violence would be executed by Lady Rockforest. She recollected that Eustace had told her that he had often suspected that Lady Rockforest was partially insane. Her appearance in some respects corroborated the supposition, and yet not entirely so. Guilt and mental torture were more legibly stamped on that sharpened face than the vagueness of a maniac.

But Caroline Mildmaye had no leisure for reflection at such a moment, though she had some instinctive apprehension that the Lady Rockforest was a maniac, and the notion of being shut up with such a person in that lone place at such a time of night, and far from help, was enough to terrify her still more, and confound her senses with the stupefaction of despair. A glance at the room showed her that she was in a well-furnished apartment. It was a large chamber; it had three tall windows draped with heavy curtains; in the centre of the room was an oval table covered with prints, and an old-fashioned sofa was drawn up between the win-

dows and the great fireplace, in which was a wood fire that burned cheerily enough. There was a large book-shelf hung up on one of the walls, with several volumes upon it, and there were several books scattered about the room, and altogether the apartment had that air of comfort which belongs to an inhabited chamber. But there was a singularly close and musty smell in the chamber, as if fresh air was not often admitted into its precincts.

"Sit you there, my fair dame," said Lady Rockforest, pushing Caroline with some violence into the chair near the fireplace. "I shall be with you in an instant." And with hasty stride Lady Rockforest quitted the room and proceeded to the outer chamber, where Caroline heard her locking fast the open door on the lobby, while she continued to mutter to herself.

"Oh, God! have mercy on me!" cried Caroline, bursting into tears, and looking around her for some means of escape; but Lady Rockforest's return cut off all

thought of what chance there might be of finding a deliverance.

Advancing towards Caroline, Lady Rockforest stood before her trembling prisoner.

"Look at me, Caroline Mildmaye!" she cried. And with terror-stricken obedience Caroline raised her eyes to the unhappy being that stood before her. What a face then met her eyes! It was not a countenance of malignity and innate evil, like the diabolical aspect of Ullathorne; but it was so dreadfully miserable, so haggard with care, so conscience-stamped with the marks of inward torture, that it was a fearful sight. The long and aquiline nose, the great and staring black eyes, the grizzled grey hair, the long features of the chiselled face, and its sunken cheeks, were most remarkable. There Lady Rockforest stood before her, tall, gaunt, and ghastly in her figure, habited in sable weeds, which looked still more dreary, as a white serge robe appeared underneath, while the outer garments were parted in the middle.

"You tremble, Miss Mildmaye, as you

find yourself in my power. How you seem to quail as I fix my eyes upon you! Ha! ha! you seem like fear personified. If I had my drawing-tools ready, I should like to sketch that face. Nay! nay!—I am not going to eat you. Come, now, none of your fainting fits; we have no ladies' maids with smelling-salts in this house, so you had better bear up. Stay, I shall administer to you a cordial for your nerves."

Going to a press in a corner of the chamber, Lady Rockforest drew forth a bottle bound up in wicker-work, and she brought a liqueur-glass along with her, and filling it out, offered it to Caroline. The latter hesitated taking it, and was murmuring out a refusal, when, with indignant voice, Lady Rockforest exclaimed,

"Why, you silly thing, do not suppose that I want to poison you. It's the best cordial that can be drunk. See here, how I take it." And, taking the glass, she drained off its contents. "Now drink of it, and cure your nervousness;—drink! I say," she cried, presenting Caroline with a full glass of the liqueur.

As Caroline attempted to obey her commands, her nervousness was so great that she let the glass fall, and broke it into splinters.

"Curses upon you! Foolish, cowardly, silly girl, you have broken my glass!" cried Lady Rockforest, and there leaped from her lips two or three terrific imprecations that cannot be repeated. "I hate the breaking of glass as I hate to dream of the rattling of the chains in hell. Yes! hell! Curses upon you, too, for carrying me there; for I am in hell now—damned—damned—damned!" And she ground her teeth together, while her hands and arms and the muscles of her face were contorted with spasms.

And then she burst into a prolonged hysteric shriek—a melancholy wail, whose very tones sounded like those of some boding bird of ill-omen, and seemed to be wrung from the broken heart of a being blasted for ever by the dreadful wrath of the Most High.

But, making a great effort, Lady Rockforest tried to recover herself; and, while two great tears trickled down her furrowed

cheeks, she again went to the corner of the chamber, and returned with another glass, which she filled with the liqueur, and presented to Caroline.

"Come, I do not want to see you shivering and shaking thus; drink, I say."

"I cannot do so; I would rather not; I am not accustomed to——"

"Out upon your saucy tongue for insinuating that I am accustomed to drinking. If your cousin Eustace told you so, he told you what was false. Come, you must drink this cordial; it will do good to your shaking nerves."

Scarcely knowing what she was doing, Caroline tried to obey, and took a couple of slight sips of the cordial. While doing so, Lady Rockforest watched her intently, staring at her with a steady and penetrating gaze. The warmth of the fire, as well as the heat of the room, had to some extent revived Caroline after the cold of the corridor, and she was slightly more at ease than she had been. She timidly put the glass out of her hand after merely tasting of its contents, and looked towards Lady

Rockforest, who was standing on the hearth.

"Yes," cried the latter, "you may well look at me with some curiosity, after what your cousin Eustace has told you of me!"

Caroline could not help feeling that it was quite true that casual conversations with her cousin had strongly raised in her emotions of wonder at the strange character of Lady Rockforest, but she did not at the moment realise the full significance of Lady Rockforest's words.

"I have never said or done anything to your prejudice, Lady Rockforest. I have never in any way done you an injury."

"What! You have done me no injury, indeed. Was it nothing, truly, to have been worming secrets about me from your cousin, the blabbing priest? Was it nothing to have been so often talking to him about 'my strange character,' my terrible appearance, and so forth, and to have been making him describe the house in which you are now confined. So, forsooth, you think that I do not know of all the attempts you have made to pry into my secrecy?"

"I have never done so," answered Caroline; "I have never meddled with your affairs, madam, in any way."

And when Caroline spoke thus, she meant to have answered nothing but the simple truth; nor was there then upon her mind the slightest consciousness that she had ever in any wise given grounds for the accusation brought against her.

As Caroline spoke, Lady Rockforest scowled, and then her face assumed a stern calmness. Drawing close to Caroline, she spoke with a low voice and menacing air, while the scrutinising gaze of an inquisitor appeared stamped upon her features.

"What! do you, Miss Caroline Mildmaye, mean to tell me to my face, that you have never had any conversations with your cousin Eustace about my 'extraordinary life,' as you were pleased to term it? Do you recollect the flower-garden behind Belvyddyr Hall, and the Chinese arbour in it? Do you forget that, when Eustace Mildmaye was on a visit there, you held a long talk with him, and made him, in all its details, describe the

interior of this house where you now are? Do you forget, also, on a certain evening in Portman-square, how you cross-examined him at such length about his 'strange penitent,' as you called me, and how the blabbing parson told you that at a future time he might possibly tell you more, but not to press him so just then? Have you the assurance to tell me to my face, Caroline Mildmaye, that you had not those two conversations with your cousin, all about me?"

It was with a sense of terrible fear that Caroline's mind recalled the identical conversations alluded to by Lady Rockforest. She had a dim recollection of the talk in the Chinese arbour, and she recollected perfectly having spoken to Eustace about Lady Rockforest one night in Portman-square.

She was bewildered at finding what accurate information Lady Rockforest possessed about her. She could not conceive how such knowledge had been obtained. Confounded at the discovery that Lady Rockforest had heard of those conversations, entered upon at the time with so

much carelessness as to have actually passed out of her memory until distinctly recalled to it, Caroline looked stunned.

"Ah! I have caught you, my dame," said Lady Rockforest; "you dare not deny the truth."

"Oh! Lady Rockforest," sobbed Caroline, "I never meant to have annoyed you or given you any idle pain. Oh! what harm have I done, that you should thus seize on me and drag me from my friends? What harm, if——"

"What harm have you done, you ask?" replied Lady Rockforest. "I will tell you what you have done." And Lady Rockforest drew a chair close to where Caroline was sitting, and spoke in a low voice:

"You are the daughter of Mary Mildmaye—the foulest enemy that I ever met in my life. It was your wretch of a mother that damned me, and sent me into hell. Yes, girl, hell. I say, hell—hell! Do you hear the word? I am damned—ay! damned—body and soul, and all through the means of your atrocious mother. May she suffer for ever the plagues——"

And while the miserable peeress was invoking curses on the soul and memory of the mother of her prisoner, she was seized with a renewed fit of coughing. It came on with fearful violence, and seemed as if it would tear out her lungs.

"Ugh! ugh!—this cough is killing me —death is coming at last to me—he can't be many months off from me now—ugh! ugh! ugh! No matter—I shall have some more revenge on my enemies before I die—ugh! ugh!—this hateful cough—I am choked with it." And Lady Rockforest's figure was fearfully agitated by the violence of her coughing, under which one might have supposed that she would have expired at any instant.

Frightened as Caroline Mildmaye was on that memorable night, she could not help feeling shocked at the sight of Lady Rockforest's form, bending beneath the violence of a racking and fatal disease. But she had no time to wonder, for Lady Rockforest soon fixed her gaze upon her, and returned to assail her with fresh reproaches.

"Yes! you would be a spy on me, for-

sooth. You would, by means of your cousin, find out what I have wished to conceal. Well, we shall see what you will gain by it."

And when she said these words, Lady Rockforest gave a chuckle, and looked fiercely at her prisoner.

"Oh! Lady Rockforest," cried Caroline, "you are entirely mistaken. I have never sought to invade your privacy, and I never meant to annoy you. I know nothing whatever of your secrets."

"Do not think, Miss Mildmaye, that you can deceive me. I know of your conversations with your cousin: I heard all about them. Ah! you may well look confounded. It is not for nothing that some folks say I have supernatural power. Though your cursed, execrable mother drove me from fashionable society, I know well what passes amongst all the haughty Pharisees of May Fair. Curse—curse upon your mother's hated name! I hated you, Caroline Mildmaye, from the moment that I saw you, when, after returning from school, you lived at Boxgrove. Yes! you

are as like your mother, as if she had come back from hell to plague me again."

"Oh! my poor mother!" sobbed out Caroline.

"She was an odious, hateful, cursed wretch!" cried Lady Rockforest. "Curses on her for having sent me to the devil before herself! What's that I see sparkling on your breast?"

And Lady Rockforest made a rapid spring, and tore from Caroline's bosom a large locket, which contained a fine miniature of her mother, on whom the awful person by her side was then showering imprecations.

"Ha! ha!" shrieked Lady Rockforest —"'tis she herself! There she is, as I knew her when we both drove round the Park, when the Allied Sovereigns were in London. There are her false eyes, and her treacherous smile, and the lips that blasted my name. I could almost fancy I hear her speak. Oh! thou serpent that I once took to my heart, and that stung me. Ah! traitress! But I had my revenge—you never recovered from what I

said to you at Brighton. I smote you to your grave — even as I crush you again."

And raising up the miniature as high as her arm would allow, she dashed it into fragments on the hearthstone, and even trampled it with her feet.

"Yes!—yes! I will crush you again and again, as I have done before. You destroyed me once, and I will destroy you again." And with fiendish rage the infuriate peeress trampled the miniature into fragments.

Caroline Mildmaye burst into tears, as she saw this insult to the memory of her mother. But Lady Rockforest was unmoved at the emotion she exhibited. She allowed Caroline for a moment to give way to her feelings, and she then spoke:

"Have I not a right to hate your mother, Caroline Mildmaye? Was she not my early friend and companion in youth? Did not my family show Mary St. Pierre every kindness, and aid in introducing her to society in London? Was it not at my father's house that she was first entertained after marriage? Was

she not my companion, and was she not trusted by me in nearly all my secrets?"

Here Lady Rockforest was again seized with violent coughing, which interrupted her speaking for some time. But she again resumed her speech:

"Yes! Caroline Mildmaye, your mother was a wicked enemy of mine. She was a traitress to me, though I had loaded her with obligations. She was my first friend —and also my first enemy. We read the same books together; we had the same masters and mistresses in languages, drawing, dancing. Together we went to our first ball at Lady Waterston's. We drove round the town together in the same phaeton, and we were presented at Court on the same day. Ah! those were happy days, when Beau Brummell was in the height of his glory, and when George the Fourth still played the man of gallantry, and when Carlton House was in its full lustre. Ah! how bright the world wagged with me then! What smiles there were for me, wherever I went! How I was praised, loved, admired, and flattered! Ay! and how Jack Wilmot poured his

flattery into my ear before my marriage with Lord Rockforest, and how "the fair Pendarves" was a toast in those days! Yes! yes! the old times come back again upon me quite plainly. And it was your mother that blasted all my happiness. It was that very Mary St. Pierre, whom I had taken to my bosom, that turned on me, and blighted me with her tongue in an evil hour; but I had my revenge. Curses on her! I had my revenge. My tongue blasted her into hell. How pale she looked when I met her suddenly in Cockburn's Library, at Brighton! Ah! how she quailed before my denunciation. I made her shake, as I cursed the fruit of her womb. Her son never lived. She died herself, in bringing him forth. Yes! yes! I had glorious revenge, and I shall have more. There you sit, quivering with terror. I have not done with the family yet."

"Oh, madam! what have I done to you," cried Caroline, weeping, "that you should destroy me? I am innocent of any plottings against you——"

"Destroy you, indeed! Pshaw, child!

who talks of destroying you? It is *married* —and not murdered—you shall be. Why, you get more pale than ever at the thought of being married. Ha! ha! ha!" And Lady Rockforest laughed with furious glee. "How comical it is to see a young lady quaking and shaking at the thought of being married. Ay! in this very house you shall be married. Yes! yes! and in presence of your mother, too. Yes! child —in presence of your own mother you shall be married. La! do not stare so. Why, I was with your mother to-night, before I met you on the stairs. Should you like to see her? So you shall. Yes! you shall. This very instant I'll take you to her."

At that time Caroline really believed that Lady Rockforest was a raving maniac, and was completely bereft of her senses. The eyes of the unfortunate peeress were bright with terrible excitement. A strange lurid smile lighted up her wasted features. Her tone, her manner, and her whole appearance assumed a singular loftiness of expression. At times there was the expression of rage and vengeance on her

countenance, as she referred to the injuries which she had received from the mother of Caroline Mildmaye. But again there was an air of dignity and towering pride, that told that all the personal stateliness of the haughty race of Pendarves had not yet been extinguished in her breast. A common spectator might have been justified in supposing that the miserable peeress was perfectly insane, but one accustomed to observe lunatics might not have come to the same conclusion.

As the word "married" was repeated again and again by Lady Rockforest, the recollection of the man's hat and boots suddenly flashed across the mind of Caroline. She was more terrified than ever, as apprehensions of criminal violence flashed across her mind. Yet words came to her lips in spite of her terror.

"Married!" she stammered. "Oh! Lady Rockforest, you are a gentlewoman —you are of a noble stock—I have never wronged you. Oh! do not dishonour one who has never injured you."

"Dishonour!" returned Lady Rockforest; "why, what is the girl talking of?

I said you are to be married, and in presence of your mother, and I shall now show you the chamber in which I shall have the ceremony performed."

She went to the table and rang a small silver hand-bell violently, and Caroline was astonished to see a small door near the foot of the large bed open suddenly, and there came into the apartment a sullen-faced servant woman.

"Light up, Jane—light it up again: I shall make another visit there this night. Come, do not stand there looking at me. This young lady must see my oratory this very night. Light it up without delay."

The servant woman ducked her figure as if curtseying, and immediately retired.

"Yes, Miss Mildmaye, I shall introduce you to the room where I pass many an hour of meditation, and where I think of the days that are no more. Ah! those were happy times with me, when I was young as you are, when George IV. was Prince Regent, and when he was at the head of the dandies. Yes, 'tis as if it were but yesterday to my memory when your

mother and myself were escorted by Beau Brummell and Lord Alvanley to the Hanover-square Rooms. And don't I recollect how proud I was at Lord Lansdowne's, when Lord Byron paid more attention to me than to your mother, and how he took no notice of her, and how mortified she was at seeing the great poet speaking to me for half an hour. Ah! there were geniuses and wits in those days, and lovely women too, not like the forward, saucy, half-bred school-girls of these times, with their smattering of penny magazines. Your mother, too, was as handsome as she was false—as capable of fascinating a man as she was of betraying a woman. Curses on her for ruining me! I might now be at the head of society but for her; and 'twas she found out my secret. Oh, traitress that she was!"

And Lady Rockforest burst into a paroxysm of tears, and seemed in spasms of torture. She put her hands before her face, and rocked herself to and fro in a chair, as if her senses were distracted. At another time, and under different circum-

stances, the compassion of Caroline Mildmaye would have been moved at the sight of so much misery. But then she felt too overpowered to give any consideration to the sight of wretchedness before her. Nor had she much time for contemplating the wretched peeress, for, before many minutes, the door in the side of the room again opened, and the servant woman appeared.

On the moment at which the door opened, Lady Rockforest cried,

"Come, Miss Mildmaye, we shall proceed to what I shall call your nuptial chapel. Nay, do not linger; we must go there, and do not hesitate. Come! do not be afraid. You shall have no reason to regret it. Ungrateful child! you are going to see your own mother."

At the last words Caroline felt increased alarm; but her senses were subdued. She was in a state of extreme terror, and was quite unable to resist the pressure of the overpowering influence of the extraordinary person before her. She followed the peeress mechanically out of the room, and

passed through the outer chamber to the lobby.

"There," cried Lady Rockforest, "are my recollections of other times. There is my gallery of the celebrated dead." And she pointed to several portraits hanging on the walls; and Caroline, frightened as she was, remembered how her cousin Eustace had interested her by his description of the remarkable series of works of art which Lady Rockforest had shown him, some of them the work of her own hands.

"Ah! there is a couple who passed gay lives." And she pointed to the portrait of Charles Fox, standing near a model of the Duchess of Devonshire. "I did them before I came here; and that cursed mother of yours used to say Angelica Kauffman and Anna Damer were nothing to me. Ah! that vile flattering mother of yours! What matter, though I smashed your little miniature, you shall be near her soon. There's not a week of my life that I'm not in company with your mother. Ay! you shall soon see her. Pretty girl to be trembling so, on being taken to see your parent!"

After traversing the lobby, they were again upon the corridor at the foot of the staircase where Caroline had first encountered Lady Rockforest. A cold gust of wind whistled along the dreary passage, and nearly extinguished the oil-lamp in Lady Rockforest's hand. Turning to the left, they passed down the long passage in which Lady Rockforest had first appeared. The air grew colder and colder at every step; the darkness of the passage seemed to increase, but still, as if by some spell, Caroline felt herself lured on, and unable to resist the authority of the awful personage by her side.

On reaching the end of the corridor they passed through a small door, and Caroline beheld a winding staircase. Lady Rockforest stood on the first steps of it, and prepared to descend, but Caroline drew back in alarm.

"Come, there must be no hesitation; you must not be afraid to enter where I go every week of my life."

Still Caroline hesitated, and trembled with fear. Lady Rockforest then caught

her firmly by the arm, and said, "You must descend." And Caroline, unable to resist, found herself descending the staircase. It appeared to be of considerable length, and the stairs grew narrower as they descended, while Caroline's terror increased at every step. The atmosphere became close and oppressive; but after going down for some time, a chill blast of air came, which made Caroline feel as if the blood in her veins had frozen, and Lady Rockforest's cough seized upon her with great violence.

Soon, however, they resumed their descent, and they found themselves in a vaulted passage, cold, dismal, and sepulchral in appearance. It seemed to be of great length, as if it stretched entirely under the mansion. The light of the lamp in Lady Rockforest's hand flickered as a draught of wind came from the farther end of the vault to which she bent her footsteps.

"Come, Miss Mildmaye, you shall soon see something worth your notice. You need not be alarmed, girl; if it had been

my object to assassinate you, I could have done so long ago. So! here comes the sacristan of my chapel." And the servant appeared in sight, with a light in her hand. She came out of a door in the passage.

"Is all ready?" cried Lady Rockforest. And the woman nodded assent. A stream of light appeared to issue from the room out of which she had just come.

"Come, we shall enter," said Lady Rockforest. And seizing Caroline Mildmaye by the arm, she dragged her into a place, the very first sight of which filled her with horror.

The first object that met her view, amid a blaze of brilliant light shed from several tapers, was a coffin, apparently new, placed on a stand in the middle of the room. The whole apartment was draped with black cloth, spotted at intervals with funereal emblems, and with death's heads and cross-bones worked elaborately in silver tissue. Several sconces were fixed in the walls, and the tapers were all lighted. The floor was covered also with black, and it appeared to be carpeted, while the embers

of a fire gleamed in a small stove, which accounted for the heat of the apartment. The coffin seemed to rest on a long table, which was also covered with black, and even the ceiling of the apartment was also black, and covered with the same gloomy symbols that looked so ghastly on the walls.

"Here I shall be buried when this vile cough shall have done its work," said Lady Rockforest—"here I come to meditate on my coffin. This is my oratory, where I reflect on the worthlessness of life. In that coffin I shall lie, and the chamber shall remain as it is. You see that it will be hard to get me out of it." And Lady Rockforest, pointing to an enormously thick iron door which led into the chamber, closed it, and shut them completely in.

The extraordinary character of the whole place — the sight of the coffin — of the lighted tapers—of the symbols of death around—the dreariness and gloom of the spectacle, communicated to Caroline Mildmaye an oppressive sense of horror. It was increased when Lady Rockforest bade her to approach the coffin, and read the inscription on its lid:

"THE HONOURABLE MARGARET CATESBY,
Wife of Charles,
Tenth Lord Rockforest, and
Daughter of Reginald,
The sixth Viscount Pendarves,
Died ,
Aged years."

"Yes! that has been done this five years, and the coffin is still without a tenant. How much longer it shall be so, I know not. But," continued Lady Rockforest, "I have to introduce you to your mother yet. Ha! ha! ha! how the poor little thing quakes! Why, child, your teeth chatter! What an undutiful daughter you are, to be afraid of seeing your own mother! And yet it is in her presence, and in this very room, that you shall be married. Oh! I shall have sweet revenge for what she did to me," cried the wretched peeress, addressing herself to the servant woman.

Caroline was at that moment horror-stricken; her head began to reel—the lights danced before her eyes—her speech was gone—her will completely paralysed.

She saw Lady Rockforest walk over to the opposite end of the vault, and in another instant the drapery on the wall of the vault was drawn rapidly back, and disclosed the dreadful spectacle of another coffin, standing erect against the wall. The light shone on the brass plate, with the inscription:

"MARY,
Wife of George Mildmaye, Esq.,
Died 14th May, 1819,
Aged 33 years."

"Yes! Caroline Mildmaye, this is my oratory while I live, as it shall be my tomb after my death. Here I have come for years; here I live in thought again over the days that are passed away; here I muse on happy hours never to return; here I summon to my fancy all the persons whom I knew. Here I ponder on the gay time I spent when your mother called me her *Marguerite des Marguerites*, and yet she was the first to shoot the arrow against me—

"'Blow, blow thou wintry wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As *her* ingratitude.'"

And the unhappy peeress burst into tears, but soon recovering herself, continued:

"But no matter; I have had fine revenge, and I shall have more of it. If I have the pangs of memory, I have its pleasures too. 'Twas I that smote your mother to her grave—'twas I that had her coffin taken up—'twas I that put her *there!*" And Lady Rockforest gave a wild burst of frantic laughter, which was most terrible in its demoniacal glee.

The view of the missing coffin of her mother, stolen from her tomb, and, above all, the consciousness that she was standing close to the mouldering remains of her mother's mortal form, combined to wring with anguish and consternation the heart of Caroline Mildmaye. The insult offered to her parent by disinterring her was still present to her confused feelings; and yet it was not without terror that she listened to Lady Rockforest's admission that the actual remains of her dead mother were enclosed in the coffin. Overpowered with emotion, Caroline heaved convulsive sobs, while her brain was dizzy with a bewildering sense of terror.

But it was not long that she remained thus. The voice of Ullathorne, outside the door, recalled her to her senses; and even then she had reason enough remaining to recollect that she had believed that Ullathorne was a man in female attire. The ominous words of Lady Rockforest, "You shall be married, not murdered," suggested themselves to her fancy, and an overwhelming sense of horror seized upon her mind.

"Open the door!" cried Mrs. Ullathorne, outside; and Lady Rockforest immediately proceeded to obey the request of Ullathorne. In doing so, there was some slight difficulty experienced, but it soon swung back upon its ponderous hinges, and with an aching sense of terror Caroline looked towards the door.

As it opened, Mrs. Ullathorne entered, holding a lamp in the right hand, and immediately stood aside for another person to come in. Close behind came a man, in whose snake-like eyes, sinister countenance, large eyebrows, and pale face, Caroline Mildmaye recognised the person from whom Eustace Mildmaye had more than once seemed to shrink, and

whose appearance had occasionally riveted the attention of Louisa and herself.

Appalled with most horrible apprehensions, completely cowed by the terrors of her situation, Caroline shrieked aloud with the screaming notes of despair. The place for a moment seemed to her as if it were all on fire, her brain reeled, and, in another instant, she fell senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER II.

UPON the afternoon of the second day, when Mrs. St. Pierre and Louisa Mildmaye had started for Dryford to see the invalid, it chanced that Fanny Bunbury was visiting Miss Tufton, who, after considerable hesitation, had accepted the hand of Lord Beauparc. Both girls had become great friends, and often amused themselves by sketching out plans of what they should do when one would be Lady Beauparc, and the other Mrs. Baskervyll. Neither of them liked the Mildmaye girls: they were jealous of the superior beauty and graces possessed by them, and being both very rich, they rather looked down upon the comparatively dependant position of

the cousins of the St. Pierres. The rumoured engagement of Caroline with her cousin, the young clergyman, had placed her lower in their eyes; but there was something of pique in the idea that Louisa Mildmaye was to be married to Lord Rockforest, possessing one of the oldest titles in England, and supposed to be very rich.

Miss Tufton was just at the moment talking about him to Fanny Bunbury, and was relating various rumours that had reached her ears about his having been "such a dreadfully wild person." Fanny Bunbury eagerly listened to the stories; she was not disappointed in finding that Louisa Mildmaye's marriage had several unfavourable points; but in her affected air of fashionable frivolity she pretended to make light of the flying scandals about Lord Rockforest.

"Vicious he may be," cried Fanny Bunbury, "but a lord can never be very far wrong. My dear, Lord Rockforest is delightfully aristocratic. These peccadilloes must be pardoned and forgotten. Heigho! I wish that I could change Daddy Dryas-

dust for a Lord Rockforest. Oh! how I should enjoy confronting the bay-window at White's, driving down as 'Lady Rockforest on her marriage.'"

"For shame with such levity! Fanny," said Miss Tufton. "I am sure that nothing on earth would induce me to marry such a man."

"Oh, but, my dear child, we all know that you are sure to be Lady Beauparc, and of course you can afford to be blind to the sparkle of Lord Rockforest's coronet. But, without exaggeration, for my part I look upon all these whisperings about Lord Rockforest to be nothing but censoriousness. No doubt Lord Rockforest may have his dissipations, like other men of fashion; but he is not worse than others, you may depend upon it, my dear."

"I should be very sorry to think that the nobility of England were to be judged by such a specimen as Lord Rockforest."

"Well, my dear," said Fanny, "have it all your own way. Let the man be as black as you please——"

Just then a loud knock came, and Miss Tufton went to the window, and said,

"It's Lord Beauparc and my uncle Peter. You need not go away, Fanny. They will talk on business together in the study, and my presence will not probably be required."

"Oh, happy girl that you are!" cried Fanny Bunbury, "going to be married to a peer."

"And oh, happy girl that you ought to be! going to be married to so great a commoner as Mr. Baskervyll."

"Psha! my dear child," said Fan Bunbury, in her light, thoughtless way, "of course you know the real reason why I marry old Daddy Dryasdust."

"And what may be that reason, madam?" said a whistling, hissing kind of voice close behind her. It was Daddy Dryasdust himself — Mr. Baskervyll, so nicknamed by the unthinking and volatile ladye of his love. He had called in with Lord Beauparc to tell the news of the morning to Miss Tufton, the bride-elect of Lord Beauparc, and his person had been mistaken by Miss Tufton for that of her uncle Peter, her guardian. Lord Beauparc had remained below in the hall, to

give some directions to one of Miss Tufton's servants, whom he was sending down to Beauparc to see about the fittings for his bride's boudoir, and Mr. Baskervyll, hearing that Miss Bunbury was visiting, had stolen slyly up-stairs, in order to give his Fanny a surprise, little expecting that it was he himself that would be surprised.

"Now, Miss Bunbury, I told you, madam, that I would have no nicknames, and I find you speaking disrespectfully of me behind my back, calling me by an odious appellation. I am angry—exceedingly angry, at your conduct." And, in truth, he did look very wrathful, and not a little ridiculous too. His mouth was slightly contorted, and the little man's eyes flashed with fire. In his fit of passion he forgot his dates, his anecdotes, his quotations, and his perpetual ejaculation of, "I'll tell you a very curious thing about that." The only one of his customary phrases that he was now heard to utter was, "'Tis *shimful*—'tis *shimful*—'tis really quite *shimful!*"

Any one else would have been utterly taken aback by being overheard delivering such an awkward speech as had escaped from Fanny Bunbury's lips, but she was in no wise disconcerted or daunted by it, and at once exclaimed,

"Now, what was I saying, my dear, generous, good Mr. Baskervyll. I was saying, 'Of course you know the reason why I marry,'—and what is that reason, but that my carelessness may be corrected by your admirable criticism—that my foolish little ways may be amended by your superior wisdom—and that my life may be regulated by your presiding intellect? Yes! it was that I was saying to Miss Tufton."

"Ah!" said Mr. Baskervyll, with dry bitterness, "but you didn't say it."

"But I was going to say it, my dear Baskey!" cried Fan Bunbury, in a coaxing, wheedling way; and she contrived to put much piquancy into her manner.

Mr. Baskervyll growled, and looked very angry.

"Nay! nay!" cried Miss Tufton; "I assure you, Mr. Baskervyll, that Miss Bun-

bury said nothing whatever that a gentleman may not be proud to hear. You are too severe on Miss Bunbury."

"My dear," pouted Fanny, "the man is going to be eaten up by the green-eyed monster. Oh dear me, what a sad fate is mine!" And there were symptoms of a shower.

When a woman argues with a man, there is nothing like moist eyes to soften the male disputant. Either he yields, or he is obdurate: in the first case, the victory is on the side of the petticoat; on the other alternative, the man is "a monster," deserving of anathema.

Lord Beauparc (who had just come up) then interfered, and said something, after having been first whispered by Miss Tufton in a most confiding manner, and then the sky became serene; the clouds passed from Mr. Baskervyll's brow, and Fan Bunbury's face was April again. In truth, however, we must record, that the wicked girl might be seen to give an "aside" look to her friend Sally Tufton.

"Did you hear about Lord Rockforest?" asked Lord Beauparc.

"Dear me! not a word. We were just talking of him," cried Fanny.

"He's before the police court again to-day," observed Lord Beauparc.

"And what is it about?" eagerly asked Miss Tufton. "Nothing scandalous, I hope?"

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know; it's about something or other, I suppose," said Lord Beauparc.

"Louisa Mildmaye is likely to have a nice time of it with him. Poor girl!" continued Fanny Bunbury, "I think that I shall go and see her. Will you come?" addressing herself to Miss Tufton. But the latter looked at Lord Beauparc, and Miss Bunbury took a hint, and asked Mr. Baskervyll to accompany her.

"I have an engagement near St. James's-square——" he was beginning.

"Yes, of course you have. I know where it is; you're off to Butler and Simkins——"

"Puttick and Simpson, Fanny. Yes, yes, there's such a charming copy of the 'Giggei Thesaurus Linguæ Arabicæ,' bound in vellum, four volumes, folio edi-

at the sale of Queen Charlotte's books in 1819. It was bought for her late Majesty at Colonel Stanley's sale in 1813, and I have private information that makes me surmise that Colonel Stanley got it at Isaac Reed's sale in 1807. I am sure he did, and I know for certain that Isaac Reed's came to him from one of his near relatives, who got it from a gentleman that bought it at Carteret Webb's sale in 1771. Well, my dear, Sir Launcelot Althorpe has an impression that he was told by the librarian of the late Marquis Townshend that he once saw a letter addressed to Cumberland, the author, saying that all Carteret Webb's English translations were——"

"A pack of dusty, fusty, musty, rusty, crusty old rubbish, like that motheaten lumber in your hand, Mr. Baskervyll!" cried Fanny, with half-peevish vivacity. "But wait, my dear," she cried, addressing Miss Tufton, "until he's married to me, and you'll see how I'll modernise his tastes. But who can that be walking over the way with Sir Vaughan Gwynne?"

continued Fanny, running rapidly to the window.

"'Tis Mr. Henry Wilmot," said Miss Tufton. "And how deeply engaged they are in conversation. How grave they both look!"

"It must be an argument about amendments in the New Poor Law," said Mr. Baskervyll.

"Or perhaps 'tis a dialogue about whether it would be advisable for Sir Vaughan to call in an architect to try and cure the defects of Llangaer Castle."

"I'll engage there's a petticoat at the bottom of it all," said Fanny Bunbury. "No two men ever looked so grave except about one of the softer sex."

"Pooh! Gwynne is not a marrying man," said Lord Beauparc.

"And Wilmot, the wit's son, has not money to marry with any one," said Mr. Baskervyll; "so it cannot be about matrimony that they are talking."

"Well," said Fanny Bunbury, "I should not be at all surprised if it were about Louisa Mildmaye that they were talking.

Or perhaps it is about Lord Rockforest that they are conversing. Well, certainly, they are a grave-looking pair. How solemnly Sir Vaughan looks, while Mr. Wilmot's fluent tongue is pouring some important matter into the baronet's ears. I vote we call them in, and ask what 'tis all about."

Miss Tufton gave a reproving look to her volatile friend, and Fanny Bunbury was silenced. Then, with some affected coaxing, she persuaded Mr. Baskervyll to accompany her out; and they took their departure. Just as they got into the street they saw a cab drawn up to the footway, and both Sir Vaughan Gwynne and Mr. Wilmot were rapidly driven away.

"I shall certainly call on sweet Louisa, and see whether she knows about Lord Rockforest," said Fanny Bunbury. "Come, Mr. Baskervyll, give me your arm."

But on arriving at Portman-square they found that Mrs. St. Pierre and Louisa Mildmaye had left town to visit their sick relative in the country, and Fanny Bunbury was deprived of the pleasure of seeing how Louisa would bear the news of

Lord Rockforest being again up before a police magistrate.

"Poor Louisa!" said Fanny, turning away from the hall-door. "I'm afraid she'll have a sad life of it."

"And I'm afraid that I'll be late at Puttick and Simpson's," said the fidgety pedant.

"Well, you're a most ungallant beau," said Fanny Bunbury. "Come, call a cab, and take me down to Puttick and Simpson's, and show me the treasures there."

"Ah! you're a sweet girl," said old Baskervyll. "I love you more than ever."

"And I love you, dear Baskey, better than ever Louisa Mildmaye will love that odious Lord Rockforest. I wonder how will poor Louisa feel when she reads to-morrow morning in the paper that Lord Rockforest has again been shown up in the journals."

Our next chapter will better explain what Louisa Mildmaye's feelings were on that point.

CHAPTER III.

We left Louisa Mildmaye at Denham Park, in the breakfast-parlour, staring over the newspaper which she held in her hand. Her face was rigid, its expression stern, and she seemed spell-bound by the contents of the paper. As she continued to read on and on, her face blanched more at every instant, until at last a death-like pallor for a moment overspread her whole countenance. Still retaining hold of the newspaper by both her hands, she allowed it to fall down over her gown, while she stood for a few minutes with closed eyes and upturned countenance. Her breast heaved with emotion, and there was agony in her face. She soon fell down upon her

knees, and remained several minutes in the attitude of prayer.

Nor was it any wonder that Louisa Mildmaye should have been shocked at what she read. She found that she had plighted her hand to a man whose character was blackened by a police-office investigation, which proved him a perfidious knave, a cruel destroyer of the youthful and unprotected, and an execrable libertine. Some of his letters and correspondence with his associates were read, which convicted Lord Rockforest of being a miserable, conscienceless wretch, vicious as such upon system. All the dark inuendoes about his character, which both himself and his influential friends had always represented as calumnies, rushed upon the mind of Louisa Mildmaye. If the name of Lord Rockforest had been that of a stranger, she would not have read a line of the proceedings, but have turned from them instinctively. And as she had read them, she felt her flesh creep with horror at finding what description of person she was about to have married.

And as Louisa rose from her knees, after

having poured out her gratitude at her escape, a strange sense of her new position came over her mind. The blow that had fallen upon her came at a time when her senses were already strained to excess by anxiety on account of Caroline, and she felt overwhelmed at the crushing blow which had suddenly been dealt to her.

Even then the thought of Henry Wilmot was present to her mind. Oh! what would she have then given that she had remained constant in her regard towards him, and that in an idle and reckless mood she had not wilfully sported with his admiration for her, and with her own heart. Yes, she felt herself punished, humbled, and almost crushed to the earth. Tears would have been a relief to her, but they did not come. There was a sense of danger present to her, which prevented her feelings being thus relieved. There was always a vein of mental energy in Louisa which had often sustained her in sad hours, at those moments when Caroline was deeply despondent. And even then there came a flashing force of will to the aid of Louisa Mildmaye. Words did not

come to her lips; but her mind would thus commune with itself:

"Away with all thoughts now of myself! I am lost, ruined, and undone. Louisa Mildmaye and her odious choice of a husband will be the talk of all London. My character, my vanity, my selfishness, my capricious disregard of other suitors, will be mocked at by censorious tongues. But what of that? What though I was undone a thousand times—what is that to my dear Cary being destroyed for ever? What has happened to her? Perhaps even now she is the victim of some nefarious design. Oh! could I save my dear sister! I feel that some dire ruin must have befallen her. Oh! my sweet Cary! You, with whom I have suffered so often—you, with whom my hours of infancy and girlhood were passed, with whom I have often played beneath the same green tree—you to be ruined and exposed to horror!"

The bare thought of such possibilities overcame the strength of Louisa Mildmaye, and she became totally unnerved. She recovered herself, however, when the

door opened, and Mrs. Denham came into the room, with a face of conventional sorrow, and her mouth full of the platitudes of trite consolation.

"Oh! believe me, my dear Miss Mildmaye, I feel for you indeed. You are, indeed, much to be pitied. That odious Lord Rockforest! I detest his name. To be sure, what dreadfully wicked people there are in this world! Only to think of a nobleman of his rank and fortune to be guilty of associating with such low characters. But, perhaps, it is all for the best. You had an escape of him, after all, and that ought to be a great comfort to you."

"Oh! Mrs. Denham, it is no matter to me now about Lord Rockforest. I can think of nothing but my sister. Until she is found I cannot have a moment of peace. I must go at once to the village, and see if any tidings have been heard this morning. At my cousin Eustace's cottage they will probably have the first news of her."

"Oh, no! You may be sure, Miss Mildmaye, that Mr. Denham will be the first to receive the intelligence. He is

always the first person to hear of anything remarkable. I recollect at the time when the Duke of Wellington was——"

But the noise of a horse quickly cantering up the avenue cut short the thread of Mrs. Denham's testimony to the greatness of her all-important husband.

"Oh! perhaps," cried Louisa, "it is some intelligence. I am so anxious; I beg to know what the messenger has to tell."

"Ah! it is only Seagrim the groom, that was sent to Dryford to see about the time for sending our plants to the Horticultural Exhibition."

But Mrs. Denham appeared to be mistaken. It was true enough that the groom she had mentioned had ridden up to the avenue; but instead of going to the gardener's lodge he rode up to the hall-door, and there was soon a quick, stout pull at the bell. In a few moments the sounds of rapid conversation, and a faint cry of "Oh!" came to the ears of Mrs. Denham and Louisa Mildmaye.

The latter stood upon no ceremony. She at once threw open the doors of the breakfast-parlour, and rapidly rushed to the

hall. The first object that met her eyes was the dismounted groom, holding his horse by the reins, while the butler, under-butler, and two or three maid-servants, were close around him, eagerly listening to his words.

"She must have been drowned, poor dear lady," was the first sound that Louisa caught clearly. The words sent a cold chill to her heart.

"No doubt she was made away with," cried another of the maid-servants. "Oh! the villains!"

At the sight of Louisa rushing suddenly into the hall, and looking the picture of anxiety, the group of servants were evidently much confused, and quite taken aback.

Two of the women began to weep, and appeared to feel much on the occasion, and there was evident concern in the looks of the men.

"What has happened? What news is there?" cried Louisa, with feverish eagerness. "Oh! tell me at once what has occurred!"

But no one seemed ready to answer her

questions. The groom held down his head, and looked confused. The first to divulge the bad news was one of the women servants.

"They say, miss—oh deary me!—that the poor lady was drownded;" and the girl began to sob. Then another of the women began to take up the crying, in chorus; and Louisa was well-nigh distracted in trying to get some intelligence from them.

"Here's the master!" cried one of the butlers; and the groom, feeling that his momentary importance with the melancholy news was at an end, led his horse aside. In a couple of minutes Mr. Denham, with a face full of woe and mystery, drove up in his curricle to the hall-door, and he was in another minute in the hall. He descended with gravity from the vehicle, and was soon addressing the tortured Louisa Mildmaye.

"I beg," said the solemn man of conventionalism, "that you will compose yourself, Miss Mildmaye."

"Oh! Mr. Denham, tell me the worst at once. Have you heard any news of her?"

"This way, if you please; mind the step at the door," said Mr. Denham, leading the way into his study, into which he conducted Louisa. They were both followed by Mrs. Denham. It was some time before the important deputy-lieutenant found himself able to speak.

"Miss Mildmaye," said Mr. Denham, "I really feel for you. I was a great friend of your poor father's. I was one of his old schoolfellows, and I would do anything in my power to serve you."

"Oh! Mr. Denham, I see by your face that something dreadful has occurred. Oh! pray tell it to me at once, and relieve my mind!" cried Louisa.

"I beg of you to calm yourself. I cannot tell you anything while you are in this state of agitation. It may be only a false report, after all."

"Oh! tell me the worst at once," said Louisa, "or this dreadful suspense may kill me."

"I wish you first," said Mr. Denham, "to nerve your spirits. Do not be cast down. Things may not be so bad as they seem; but there is some report of a lady

having been found drowned several miles down the river. I know nothing more at present; but a messenger is expected every instant at Dryford by the chief constable."

"Oh! I shall go at once then. I cannot remain here." And Louisa was beginning to get wild with excitement.

"My dear Miss Mildmaye, you surely had better remain here," said Mrs. Denham; "the intelligence can be brought here at once from the village; and your cousin's house is no place at present for you."

"I am sorry to say, also," said Mr. Denham, "that your respected kinsman, Mr. Eustace Mildmaye, is more seriously ill this morning. I am afraid that it is a very bad case."

"Oh! I cannot remain here," said Louisa; "pray do not oppose my wishes. I desire at once to go to my cousin's cottage."

And Mr. and Mrs. Denham saw that it was useless, and might be dangerous, to oppose the wishes of Louisa. In a few minutes their carriage was at the door,

and Louisa was rolling off as quickly as a pair of bays could take them, to that beautifully sequestered village, on which she had once been accustomed to gaze with such serene happiness of soul. How different were her sensations then! The anguish of her mind was tortured at the sight of the calmness of external nature; the convulsive spasms of the heart were further increased by the contrast between her own misery, and the calmness that reigned over the scene. When the soul is intensely wretched there seems to be a serene irony in the aspect of the face of nature, looking down with calm mockery on our fretting over the ills of life.

They had scarcely turned the corner of the road which led into the village, when the sight of a large crowd collected round a mounted constable caught the sight of Louisa. As the carriage approached, the crowd parted right and left to let it pass.

"Oh! Mr. Denham, this must be fresh news," cried Louisa.

"You had better go first into the cottage of your cousin," said Mr. Denham, with gravity of manner, as he observed

the horseman, whom he recognised as a mounted policeman, showing something to the crowd, which appeared to be greatly excited.

"Stop, Harford, at Mr. Mildmaye's cottage," cried Mr. Denham. "Pray, Miss Mildmaye, go in, and I shall follow you at once."

The cottage was a few paces from the crowd, and as soon as it was stopped, and that Louisa was seen descending from it, several persons broke away from the crowd, and with the vulgar curiosity of gazing upon a person in distress of mind, came up quickly to look at Louisa. Two or three were evidently animated by the hateful inspiration of being the first to tell the bad news.

"Oh, miss!" cried the widow Thornton, "the poor thing's handkerchief was found in the river. Johnson the policeman has got it. I know it well, for I often washed it, when ye both lived up at Rosebank."

"Oh, the villains that drowned her!" cried another of the Job's comforters, rushing up to contribute a quota of misery.

"But as sure as they murdered her, they'll be hung for it," cried a panting neighbour, who, in her anxiety to have some words of bad news in her mouth, had run herself out of breath.

"Support her!—she is falling," cried Doctor Goer, who had seen the carriage passing from Denham Park, and had left his house in order to receive Louisa. But Louisa did not fall, or swoon, though she turned deadly pale: she could not bear the looks of commiseration which met her gaze. She longed to be alone, that she might hide her torture of soul; and taking Mr. Denham's arm, with faint heart and weakly steps she walked slowly into the cottage of her cousin, followed by Doctor Goer and one or two of Eustace Mildmaye's friends.

"Bring in the policeman," said Mr. Denham. "Miss Mildmaye, I hope that you will retire to another apartment while Doctor Goer and I can examine Dorman, and then communicate the result to you."

"No, no! certainly not, Mr. Denham. Let me this instant see the policeman without delay."

Louisa was then undergoing exquisite agony of mind. The idea of her sister having come to an appalling death by foul means was vividly present to her imagination; and though she had known much of human anguish in the sudden decease of her father, and the rapid fall of herself and her dear sister from affluence, she never experienced such sensations of torture as were then racking her mind.

The parlour-door then opened, and Dorman the constable entered with a grave face. He seemed greatly pained, and Louisa Mildmaye recollected that Dorman had often received kindness from her father, and had been a sort of dependant on the family at Boxgrove in former times.

"What is that?" cried Louisa, jumping up eagerly from the sofa, and seizing convulsively a white handkerchief that was in the hands of Dorman.

"Oh, God! it is hers," she cried. "Where—where did you find it? Oh, tell me—where?"

"Please you, miss," said Dorman, "I got the handkerchief from Glenny, the boatman at Highford Ferry. He found it

floating in the river near the bank, just down near Trooper's Hole. You know it, squire," said the constable.

"But what did he say about it?" asked Louisa. "When did he see it first? At what hour did he find it? You must know something more about it?" And as she saw the saddening face of the constable, she became frantic with excitement.

"Oh, miss! I'm almost afeard to tell what Glenny saw yesterday afternoon."

"Tell me—tell me!" cried Louisa, hysterically.

"Miss Mildmaye has been prepared for the worst, Dorman," said Mr. Denham, "and it is best to comply with her request."

"You see, miss, Glenny the ferryman could not ply yesterday on account of the great flood in the river, and he went a fishing down the river for several miles, until he was nearly opposite your shooting cottage, squire; and when under the woods to the north of Catesby Court, he saw something in white, like a body floating down on the other side of the river. He was not

sure at first as to whether it was a human body or not, but he saw it borne up suddenly, and he could see plainly that it was a woman's form; and it sank again, and was carried down by the river. The river there runs deep, you know, squire; and there be steep and high banks on both sides."

"So there are," said Mr. Denham; "but what did he do then?"

"It was then getting dusk, and the place is lonesome, and he could not see very plainly across the river; and though he followed the river bank as well as he could, he could not get sight of the body again."

"But is he sure that it was a human body?" said Doctor Goer. "It is so easy to be mistaken in these matters: a few lumps of white and yellow froth, seen in the dusk floating down in a flood, have before this been mistaken for a human body."

"Ah, sir," continued Dorman, "there can be no doubt of it. For Newton the carter, when crossing Redesdale Bridge, three miles further up, also observed a

woman's body whirled down by the flood, and gave information about it at the little inn."

"But about the handkerchief?" interposed Mr. Denham.

"Well, sir, this very handkerchief was found tangled in a briar near the bank at the old weir, just where the Long Reach commences that skirts Catesby Court woods. He found it this morning."

"Are you sure it is your sister's handkerchief?" asked Mr. Denham of Louisa.

"Alas! there can be no doubt of it. I know it well; there are her initials, worked by herself, in the corner." And the sight of the traces of poor Caroline's needlework agonised Louisa Mildmaye, and made her lose all control over her emotions, which broke forth into passionate grief.

While Doctor Goer was vainly trying to console her, and endeavouring to persuade her that it might yet be possible that it was not the body of her sister that had been found, the noise of wheels was heard, and a carriage stopped at the door. Going to the window, Mr. Denham announced that Mrs. St. Pierre had come, and in

a few minutes that lady entered the cottage, and Louisa was sobbing in her arms.

Mrs. St. Pierre was greatly overcome, for the sight of Louisa dissolved in tears was enough to melt any sensitive woman, without minding even the dreadful fate of Caroline. The recollection, also, that she had been cool to Caroline on account of her affection for her cousin Eustace, added to her pain, and in the usual tranquil flow of her life, sensations of torturing apprehension were entirely unfamiliar to her mind.

Her good sense and activity of disposition did not, however, desert her. When she learned what had been discovered about a woman's body floating down the river, and about Caroline's handkerchief being found upon the beach, all her thoughts were at once directed to the recovering of the body, and to the taking of effectual means for furthering the ends of justice by discovering and punishing the perpetrators of such a foul deed.

"I believe," she said, in a whisper to

Mr. Denham, drawing him aside, "that Lord Rockforest is capable of any wickedness. Oh! to think how we have been deceived in him! Some extraordinary facts have been communicated to me about him; and yet on this morning, when driving past his house in Grosvenor-street, I saw a travelling-carriage and four at his door. I wonder where he could be going?"

She was here interrupted by Doctor Goer, who came from the other end of the room, and asked Mrs. St. Pierre to interfere and prevent Miss Louisa Mildmaye from going at once to Highford Reach, in order to search for the body of her sister.

"Now, Louisa, my dear," began Mrs. St. Pierre.

"Oh! pray do not prevent me; I cannot stay here. I am in perfect misery. From what I have heard I never will be satisfied until Highford Reach is dragged from top to bottom. I cannot sit here." And the looks of the poor thing painfully revealed the intensity of torture which she was undergoing.

"Everything will be done that is pos-

sible," began Mr. Denham, in his solemn, conventional way.

"Leave me go—leave me go—do not —oh! do not oppose my wishes," said Louisa. "It is vain for you to prevent me. I am resolved to go. Yes! I wish that I was there now. It is useless to prevent me from going. I have resolved on it."

Doctor Goer said, in a low voice, to Mrs. St. Pierre, that perhaps it was best to allow Miss Mildmaye to take her own course.

And so resolute was Louisa's manner, that even Mr. Denham himself was constrained to admit that it was best to yield to her wishes, and allow her to go, though observing that she could not possibly do more than would be achieved in her absence.

It was then settled that Miss Goer, the sister of Doctor Goer, should accompany Louisa Mildmaye to Highford, Reach, where the last traces of Caroline had been found, and that the constable should accompany them. Mr. Denham undertook, after attending the bench of ma-

gistrates that day, to join them in the afternoon at Highford, and to escort them home in the evening.

And not bestowing a thought on the state of Eustace Mildmaye, Louisa was soon, accompanied by Miss Goer, on the way to Topcliffe.

CHAPTER IV.

TOPCLIFFE was, as has been stated, a sporting cottage of Mr. Denham's, which he rarely visited since the time of his marriage. It was little better than a gamekeeper's lodge, and was tenanted by one of his keepers. The ground about it was useful only as game covers, and for lovers of the picturesque. There was a wild and desolate air about the whole place, well befitting its proximity to the vicinity of Catesby Court. The river M—— flowed between the two places, and constituted bounds between them. Immediately adjoining the banks of the river there was a long and craggy vale, which ran in a zig-zag fashion for about half a mile. The banks on either side of it rose suddenly to the

height of about three hundred feet, and the course of the river was dammed up by some natural barriers of beds of gravel which had accumulated about a mile further down. This portion of the M—— flowed in a slow and sullen stream, and was known by the name of Highford Reach. It was bounded on the northern side by Mr. Denham's gorzy covers, in which there was no timber of any considerable height; and on the south an extensive wood of old beeches and pines, on the Catesby Court lands, threw their gloomy shadows over the Reach, and kept the sun's rays from its surface.

In one or two parts of Highford Reach the scenery was remarkably picturesque, and the first Lord Rockforest, when improving his gloomy demesne, had cut a winding walk through the woods which overhung the river. In some spots vistas had been opened, and the timber cut down, so that you could see from one craggy knoll to another. This walk pursued a devious course. Sometimes it ascended to the brow of the hill which overlooked the

M——, and at other times it descended to its banks.

As Louisa, attended by Miss Goer, travelled onwards towards Highford, the weather changed, and became raw, bleak, and gloomy. Without raining, the sky was overcast, and the temperature declined perceptibly. The autumn leaves were whirled about in the breeze, and the roads were covered with mire. As they journeyed onwards the way got worse at every mile, and even the most sober and healthy mind might have felt superstitious, under the peculiar circumstances of the travellers, in seeing a large black cloud lowering heavily over the gloomy heights of Catesby Court. It did not escape Louisa Mildmaye's eye, and it was an additional element in the painful sensations which almost froze the blood in her veins. All the dreary legends that she heard of Catesby Court and its inhabitants came across her memory. The recently revealed wickedness of its present proprietor, the near verge of destruction upon which she had been standing in becoming connected with

such a man, the disagreeable notoriety which she would acquire in having her name so associated with Lord Rockforest's matrimonial designs,—all these were enough to depress and render gloomy the most cheerful person.

But when to these unpleasant circumstances was added the dreadful consciousness that her sister—her beloved Caroline, the companion of her youth, the playmate of her infancy—had been carried away by force and murdered, it was no wonder that Louisa Mildmaye should have been in the very depths of misery and despair. At intervals she was convulsed with prolonged fits of sobbing, which partly relieved her swelling bosom. Then, half blinded by tears as she recovered herself, the first object on which her eyes would rest was the long and prominent ridge of Catesby Court, with the gathering cloud over its wood-crowned height; and fresh presages of the horrible would seize upon her mind and make her heart quiver with agony.

At such times Miss Goer's well-meant endeavours added to Louisa's pangs. They

reminded her forcibly of the immense distance that exists between the sweet relationship of sisters, and every other tie that unites members of the female sex. Miss Goer was formally kind, courteous, and discreet. But these qualities only suggested the charming grace of manner, the exquisite softness of style, and the pensive elegance of dear sister Cary's high-toned and most accomplished nature. And to think that she had been murdered, and come to a dreadful end, without a friend to pray beside her body, or to receive her last sigh; oh! the thought of it was maddening, and utterly bewildering.

"We have only four miles further to travel," said Miss Goer; "and I entreat of you, Miss Mildmaye, to endeavour to keep up your spirits. You will need all the fortitude that you can command."

And the well-meant admonition was not without effect. Louisa, by a desperate effort, gave some temporary composure to her mind, and restrained her convulsive sobs. She recollected that she would probably have to stimulate those employed in searching for the body of her sister; and,

though in acute mental torture, she preserved an artificial calm.

The road now ran along a part of the river M—— in its devious windings, and they could see that the waters of the river still exhibited the traces of the flood of the previous days. The rush of water had evidently been very great. There had been trees carried away, and the road was broken up in some places. Soon they came to a wooden bridge, across which they had to proceed.

"There is Topcliffe Cottage, in the distance," said Miss Goer, pointing to a small cottage on a hill about a mile and a half away. "Were you ever up the View-tower, Miss Mildmaye?"

"I never was there at all," said Louisa; "and I am sure that I will remember this my first visit to this part of the country. Ha! what are those men about?"

And while she spoke these words Louisa became dreadfully excited. She saw a boat in the middle of the river, to which was attached a cable, held by two men on the banks, in order to prevent it drifting down

with the current. In the boat itself was a man with something like a long pole, which, from time to time, he was casting into the river. A shudder ran through Louisa's heart, as the conviction flashed that they were dragging the river for the body of Caroline!

It was then that the horror of her sister's death became most vividly realised to Louisa's mind. The idea that her corse might be under those cold and dismal waves, lying in the mud and mire of the river's bed, her eyes unclosed, the hair and raiment disarranged, and the spirit that once inhabited it fled to another world, smote poor Louisa's heart heavily, and her calmness vanished. The sight of some spectators idly looking on from feelings of curiosity, gave additional pangs to her mind. To think that her dear Caroline's death should ever be made a public wonder, and that the eyes of idle curiosity should look for the recovery of her body as a rare show worth seeing!

The driver of the carriage showed an inclination to stop as they were coming

opposite to the boat. But Miss Goer told him to drive on to Topcliffe Cottage, as she was afraid that Louisa would be completely overpowered. But Louisa cried,

"Stop—stop, for a moment. Let me know who are these men in the boat."

One of the bystanders heard the voice issuing from the carriage. He was a pensioner, with a wooden leg, and he officiously came forward:

"They be sarching in the river, leddies, for the body of the murdered lady. But it isn't there that they'll foind her, but a mile lower down, where the other boat is, near the Trooper's Hole."

"That ought to be the spot," said a labourer standing near.

"Ay! and there ought to be two more boats. Lor' a marcy! it's often a fortnight before one can recover a body. I heard my old mother once say that a woman's corpse in a river is one of the pervursest things. It floats about, here and there, and goes into the midst out of way——"

"Hush! man—hush!" cried Miss Goer, who felt for Louisa's feelings. Then the pensioner, who had been standing near

Miss Goer's side, and had not seen Louisa distinctly, doffed his hat, and said, respectfully,

"I ask pardon, mam. I didn't know as how the lady was concerned about the poor lady that's gone——"

"Drive on, Sanders—drive on!" cried Miss Goer, and the carriage was in motion again. Louisa wished to get out, and speak to the men, though her feelings almost overpowered her. But Miss Goer persuaded her to rest in the carriage, and go on to the cottage, and see Mr. Denham's steward, and learn from him all that had been done about trying to recover the body.

In a few minutes more a turn in the road brought them in sight of Topcliffe Cottage. It stood upon the top of a hill that sloped down to the bank of the river M——. It was evidently much out of repair, but it was picturesquely located, and commanded a view of the windings of the river for a considerable distance. Behind it was a tower, built partly for the sake of ornament, and partly to give a prospect of the surrounding

country. It was known by the name of "Highford Folly" in the surrounding district, and had been erected with the view, in a scarce season, of giving some employment to the poor of the parish.

They were soon at the gate which led into the small farm attached to the cottage, and they were met by the steward of Mr. Denham. Miss Goer prevailed on Louisa Mildmaye to enter the cottage, and receive there what intelligence had to be communicated by the steward. It was of some importance. Boatmen had been put on the river to drag it for the lost body; and the steward said that they had succeeded in one boat in finding a shoe, which had belonged to some lady: it was in the possession of his wife, and he would bring it.

In a few minutes the steward returned, with his wife. The latter held in her hand a small paper parcel. Louisa was seized with a nervous shudder as the steward's wife slowly unfolded the paper, and in her eagerness Louisa snatched it from her hands, and tore the paper open.

"Oh, God! 'tis hers! 'tis hers!" cried

Louisa, as she caught sight of a sarcenet shoe of a particular pattern. And she sobbed convulsively as the image of the poor drowned Caroline was powerfully brought to her imagination by the sight of this relic. The shoe was still wet; it had not been dried by the fire, and the water had only been wrung from it. The cold sensation in handling it vividly suggested the reality of the corse lying deep in the river's bed, while the waters swelled and dashed around it.

Nothing could surpass the anguish felt by Louisa. Just at that moment a dreadful sense of loneliness came over her mind. Her cousin was dying. Family differences, and her father's misfortunes, had estranged her from various members of the family. There was in Mrs. St. Pierre's stateliness and rather overpowering sense of her own dignity much to repel one with the vivacity and love of personal independence inherent in Louisa. Without Caroline, she felt quite alone in the world; and, as she gazed upon the shoe which had belonged to her, the recollection of old times rushed powerfully to her recollection, and for the

moment she sank down, overpowered by her emotions.

But the thought that the corpse of her sister was lying unburied and undiscovered, roused her with the energy of misery, mingled with affection.

"Where was it—the shoe—found?" asked Louisa, with vehemence.

"You cannot see the spot from this house unless you ascend to the View-tower, miss," answered Mrs. Tyler, the steward's wife. "It was taken out of a deep pool of the river, called the Trooper's Hole, where a soldier was drowned many years ago."

"And did they find nothing else besides?" sobbed poor Louisa.

"Not yet, miss," answered Mrs. Tyler. *Not yet!* How the words smote Louisa! How they froze the blood in her veins! How they touched her keen sense of affection! *Not yet!* It was as if she had been stabbed by some sharp weapon.

Miss Goer then ascertained that there were three boats out on the river, and that the Trooper's Hole where the shoe had been found was about three-quarters of a mile further down the stream. She fur-

ther ascertained that it was believed that the body would be found within the limits of some hundred yards at either side of Highford, as there were large gravel beds, which at intervals dammed up the waters of the M——. The steward recommended that Miss Goer should ascend the tower, and observe the windings of the river, and the position of the boats, and she would then be able to see for herself that everything had been done judiciously.

And as Louisa Mildmaye caught the import of the steward's suggestion, she at once adopted it, and anxiously desired to be led up to the tower. In moments of agitation the troubled spirit feels some satisfaction in busying itself about any petty trifles which it fancies to have important connexion with the object that may be exciting it. In all seasons of torture there are little intervals of slight rest caused by the variety of change. Such relief, however trifling, Louisa Mildmaye found in following the steward and his wife to the tower at Highford.

The tower stood in a little grass garden, and was built about thirty yards from the

cottage. It was a tall turret, with a winding staircase, and three small rooms, one over the other. The ground-floor was disposed as a summer-seat, and a place for putting away gardening tools, and at the top of it was a projecting battlement, partly castellated. Creepers had been trained to grow upon the walls, and its appearance was picturesque, if not venerable.

It was with some difficulty that Louisa Mildmaye, faint with fear and grief, ascended to the summit of the tower. The steward's wife went first, and was followed closely by Louisa, and next to her came Miss Goer. Just as they were preparing to ascend, the steward had been called aside, and he did not accompany them.

When they arrived at the battlements upon the top the largeness of the view around was immediately visible, and, in another humour of mind, Louisa's strong sense of the beautiful in nature would have been much struck by the scenes that were spread before her eyes. The country as far as Dryford and Denham Park, through which she had travelled that

morning, was visible, and in the opposite direction the windings of the M—— for many miles could be plainly seen. But the view right in front was still more remarkable. The reader will recollect that in describing the demesne of Catesby Court, allusion was made to the great grassy vista that stretched northwards in front of the house, and which appeared to be terminated by the tower, as if it stood in the lands of Catesby Court. Louisa, therefore, commanded a full prospect of the vast and desert-looking place, associated with the title of him to whom she was about to have been wedded. It stretched right and left before her in all its gloomy and tragical solemnity. The great mansion, with its dismal magnificence, without the appearance of any person moving in its vicinity; the long and imposing green vista that descended from the opposite ground, until it touched the black waters of the lake in front of the mansion; the gloomy effect, also, of the conical hill behind the house, covered with pines—all came together for the first time upon the eyes of Louisa Mildmaye, and, in the peculiar circum-

stances in which she then stood, it was not surprising that they should have made a great effect on her imagination.

The deep and death-like silence that seemed to brood over the whole of Catesby Court, the dreary effect of the autumnal weather, the leaves fast withering upon the trees, the noise of the wind as it moaned through the dark woods around, would have excited one of less sensitive temperament. Then, as the windings of the M—— caught her eyes, she perceived two boats at different parts of the river passing up and down, the men in them being apparently engaged in the same occupation as those on board the first boat, which a little while before had attracted her attention.

A considerable portion of the road which she had travelled was visible to the eye, and while she glanced backwards on their route, Miss Goer suddenly exclaimed,

"I wonder what carriage that is travelling so fast? Whither can it be going in this direction? It seems to have four horses to it."

"It may be that it is going to Catesby

Court," said Mrs. Tyler; "but, indeed, little company of any kind are ever seen at the place. I do not think it is coming towards us, at any rate. It will probably turn off at the cross-road."

The carriage was then hidden from their sight by an intervening wood, and they ceased to regard it. The attention of Louisa was then directed to the course of the river and the position of the boats; and the locality of "The Trooper's Hole," where the shoe had been found sunk, was indicated. It was at the Catesby Court side of the river, and appeared to be in a spot rather difficult of access. Thither Louisa resolved to bend her way at once, urged by some strong feeling that impelled her forward by some overpowering impulse.

As she turned to descend from the tower, she could not help being struck with the strange effect of gloom that seemed to hang over Catesby Court. In the excited state of her mind it was possible the place appeared more awful to her imagination. But its solitary character, isolated from all agreeable neighbourhood, the funereal features of its landscape, its gloomy lake and

dark hill of pines, its levelled lawns with an aspect of past grandeur, and the forlorn magnificence of the Court itself, drear, imposing, and mournful, could not but touch the heart of Louisa Mildmaye, although unconsciously to herself. She could not but remember who lived in that sad house. She could not but be conscious that the inhabitant of Catesby Court was a fit tenant for that dismal, though imposing abode; and recollecting the sort of character which Lord Rockforest had been shown, it was unavoidable that she should suppose that the murder and abduction of her sister should have been in some wise connected with that nobleman.

Never before in her life did she experience such sensations as those by which her spirit was then torn. Ah! what would she not have given that her life had continued to flow on without being exposed to such trials as those by which she was then surrounded. She had often jokingly with Caroline professed her wish that something romantic might occur to her in life; but now, when environed by tragical

incidents and horrible associations, she felt as if she had been invoking curses.

"Is this a dream?" she thought to herself, as she walked through the little garden into the sporting-lodge of Mr. Denham. "Am I awake? Am I really that Louisa Mildmaye who lived at Boxgrove, and afterwards at Mrs. St. Pierre's? Was I ever betrothed to Lord Rockforest? And is Caroline really—— Oh, Heavens! Oh, mercy! Oh that I could wake up and find that this were some horrible delusion! But it is dreadfully real—and this to happen to me, who so foolishly wished in happy hours to be placed in some tragical position."

And then poor Louisa, giving way to convulsive spasms of agony, gave abundant proofs that she was not of that race of persons known as "strong minded." She had the high personal spirit which could have endured poverty, and would have defied the world's frown, but her nerves gave way before the calamities which had crowded around her. The horror of the situation in which she was placed affected

her imagination. The realisation of the fact that Caroline had been drowned, and the sight of the boats employed in searching for her body, overpowered her, and she wept again and again as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER V.

THE tears gave her some relief. Her spirits had been previously strained intensely, and her bursts of lamentation partially lightened for the moment the load that was weighing upon her mind. Recovering her composure with a great effort, she listened to the steward's relation of all that had been done to recover the body of Caroline. She heard again of all the details of Glenny the boatman fishing up the shoe from the Trooper's Hole; and of the chances that there were of the body being still at the bottom of the deep pool where the shoe had been found.

After listening to the sad details, and hearing Mrs. Tyler talk about the number

of holes that were in the M——, and the chance that the body might not be found at once, Louisa said,

"Conduct me to the Trooper's Hole. I shall go there at once."

"Ah! Miss Mildmaye——" began Miss Goer, in expostulation.

"Nay! nay! Do not oppose me. I shall go," said Louisa. "Will you show me the path to it, Mrs. Tyler?"

"It is a mile down the stream," said Mrs. Tyler; "the best path to it lies through the Catesby demesne at the other side. You have to go down this little bit of lawn, miss, and then cross the wooden bridge, and follow the walk on the left hand. It winds through the rocks, and passes close to where the boat is placed that you saw from the top of the tower. There is a shorter path at this side of the river—but ladies could not go over it, as it is very difficult."

"You may leave us to ourselves," said Louisa, again declining the company of the well-meaning steward and his wife. Miss Goer also signified to them that it

would be as well to leave Louisa at present with herself, and some intrusive spectators, who with morbid curiosity were looking at the spectacle of Louisa's tearful agony, were motioned imperiously away.

"Ah! indeed," said Mrs. Tyler, "little did I ever think that I should have to see at Highford Reach one of the Miss Mildmayes looking for the dead body of her sister. Well, well, it is a world of woe, and dreadful things do happen in it. Oh dear! oh dear! I'm sure that I pity the poor lady from my heart." And her lamentations were echoed by the female bystanders at her side.

In the mean while, Louisa and Miss Goer continued their course towards the river. They passed along a path which led down a steep hill into a wide field, at the bottom of which flowed the M——. The path then went in a zig-zag direction, until it came to a wooden bridge, constructed of planks across the river. The bridge was only wide enough for one person at a time to cross it, and there was a handrail to hold by.

At another moment Louisa would have heartily enjoyed the beauties of the scene in which they stood. The windings of the river were diversified by bold-shaped hills that jutted out prominently, and the M—— seemed in some places like a land-locked piece of water. Its stream flowed more smoothly as it ran deeper, and it seemed to the excited apprehension of Louisa Mildmaye to exhibit a sullen, angry character, as great lumps of swollen foam drifted along upon its yellow surface. The leaves were still upon the trees in many parts of the Catesby woods, though on Mr. Denham's side of the river the foliage had recently departed.

After crossing the bridge the path ascended the opposite banks until it reached a turnstile. After passing that they came to what apparently had been a gravelled path that traversed the demesne bounds of Catesby Court. It skirted the tops of the ridges of the high land that enclosed the southern banks of the M——. Occasionally the path ascended, and sometimes it descended in its course. They passed by some gigantic beeches of vast

growth, and many objects presented themselves, over which, at another time, Louisa would have stopped to linger.

But it was not of scenery or of woodland views that she was then thinking. Yet, absorbed as was her mind, she was impressed with additional gloom when she found herself on an open space which commanded a prospect nearly as large as from the summit of the Highford Tower. Onwards towards the east flowed the M——, and she could see one of the boats, with its occupants, plying their melancholy task; and towards the right the gloomy park of Catesby Court shelved down towards the gloomy lake, while the ominous hill of pines rose darkly over the deserted and dreary house.

As Louisa and Miss Goer paced along the path, the latter directed the attention of Louisa to some person apparently driving in a small gig up towards the hill, somewhat in advance of where they stood. They could not see whether it was a man or a woman was in the gig, but they did not pay particular attention to it.

"I am afraid that we have lost our

way," said Louisa; "the path seems to be going away from the river."

"No! no! We are right," said Miss Goer, "the path turns inwards. See, it descends again." And Miss Goer was correct. They were again descending to the banks of the M——, and in a few minutes came upon the river again, where it turned round a sharp point, and disclosed to them a deep pool of water, in which was another boat that had not been before seen by them. The walk wound down to the water's edge, and Louisa quickened her pace, and felt her heart palpitate as she neared the spot opposite to which the boat was floating.

The men in the boat, seeing the ladies approaching, judged that they were friends or relatives of the murdered lady for whom they were searching, and stopped for the moment from dragging the river. Louisa's heart felt icy cold as she saw a man in the stern of the boat with a great long pole, and a river prong at the end of it, which he was throwing out from time to time.

"Oh, God!" thought she to herself,

"only think of my darling Caroline's body being caught in that way!" And her eyes were blinded with tears as her imagination pictured forth the body of her beloved sister lying on the sandy bed of the river, its eyes unclosed, its mouth open, and its garments dishevelled. Oh! there was torture in the thought. But at such moments, when dreadful ideas rush suddenly upon the mind, the soul is for a time transported, and the feelings are hurried along as if by some violent impulse. Louisa rushed forward wildly to speak to the men.

"Nothing found yet, ma'am," said one of the boatmen, leaping on the bank, and anticipating the queries of Louisa.

"There's not the least use in dragging this part of the river," said his companion; "the body was seen by Glenny floating down from the bridge at Redesdale, and it was sure to be carried down to the weir at Denham Hurst, and 'tis there that it will be found, and it's there that they ought to have been searching yesterday."

"How far on is it to the weir?" said Louisa.

"It's only four hundred yards lower down," said the man; "and if the body be not found there before a couple of hours, we may as well give up the search."

Louisa and Miss Goer, after some further talk with the men, proceeded onwards, and, leaving the Trooper's Hole, went forward on the winding path that skirted the river-side. They ascended the hill again to avoid some rocky cliffs, and after going about a hundred yards from the Trooper's Hole, they found themselves in a new sort of scene, where the country was open, and where the gravel-walk was continued at a height of about two hundred feet over the river.

"What are those men running for at the opposite side?" cried Louisa, as she beheld two men with their coats off rushing in great haste at the other side of the river. They were about two fields off from the bank.

"Run back, my dear Miss Goer—quick, quick, I beseech you—and endeavour to

find out. Run back to the last boatmen, and send them across the river to learn."

"Nay, but——"

"Haste—haste—I entreat of you. Do not mind leaving me alone. I am all impatience to know. I shall walk on slowly."

Louisa's peremptory and agitated manner compelled Miss Goer to obey her, and she turned back as she was told. She was out of sight in a few minutes, and Louisa walked on slowly in the direction of the weir. The crisis of her anxiety had almost come to its point. She felt exquisitely pained as minute after minute brought her nearer to the moment when the body of Caroline might be recovered. Her temples throbbed, and now and again a cold shudder would pass over her frame.

But she continued to walk onward still. The path ascended another of the beetling hills that hung over the winding course of the M——, and, as if by some mechanical impulse, Louisa dragged her limbs along, expecting at the next turn of the walk to come in sight of the other boat that was employed for dragging

the river. She was soon at a spot where the path traversed another of the tufted knolls that projected over the banks of the M——. In front of her she beheld another bend of the river, and about sixty yards further on was a stout female figure, with her side turned towards Louisa, apparently looking straight over the river, either at the landscape before her, or some interesting object in it. Louisa turned her eyes in the same direction, and a shudder of horror instantaneously passed through her.

Louisa beheld four men passing through a field at the opposite side of the river, bearing between them what appeared to be a dead body. She immediately saw that its dress—its white robe, and its long trailing hair—marked it as that of a female; and the consciousness that it was her beloved Caroline smote her with misery. The anguish of that moment could not be described. Alas! it was no dream that flitted before her fancy. The articles of dress found in the river only too surely indicated that her beloved sister

had been drowned by some murderer. The wretchedness of those moments was torturing beyond expression. She longed in her misery to have been able to spring across the river, and embrace the earthly remains of the companion of her childish hours, and the partner of the troubles of her maturer years.

But the men, unconscious that any one was looking on with such feelings of misery, continued to bear their burden away in the direction of Topcliffe Cottage. Their course lay through a thicket, which concealed them from the sight of Louisa; and she was so anxious, excited, and bewildered, that she returned upon her path, wishing to cross the river in the boat which she had passed. With that intention, turning on her heel, she quickened her pace rapidly, and was again in the romantic spot where the hills formed a sort of semicircle, not far from the Trooper's Hole. Scarcely had she rounded the point than she observed a man's form emerging round the opposite turning of the winding path. A glance at that figure

told her who it was! She stopped as if petrified! On and on he came. There was his strong form—his gloomy brow—his pale and scowling face. Yes! there could be no mistake about the fact—it was Lord Rockforest!

As he caught sight of Louisa, he apparently uttered some exclamation, which she could not hear, and making an eager gesture, quickened his pace towards her. He was then about sixty or seventy yards from her. The river flowed sullenly below, and the recollection of what had appeared in the police-office revelations mingled with Louisa's feelings about her drowned sister. She was terrified at the thought of meeting Lord Rockforest in that lone and secluded place. His crimes and evil habits, and the dark rumours of other affairs that had often been bruited against him, were all dreadfully present to the imagination of Louisa Mildmaye. In a panic she turned again, and ran back upon the walk. She recollected to have seen the form of a woman, and she rushed forward as fast as she could in order to seek protection. On

and on she went, but no form of a woman was visible at the spot where she had seen it only a short time before. She continued to run as fast as she could. Her breath began to leave her. The sound of her pursuer's footsteps came closer and closer. She then turned another corner of the walk, and caught sight of the form of the woman that she had seen. She was within a few feet of her.

"Help! help!" cried Louisa, as Lord Rockforest rushed forward eagerly. The strange woman turned round, and, with evil aspect and sinister gaze, Mrs. Ullathorne (for it was she) confronted Louisa, who had never before seen Mrs. Ullathorne. Agitated though her feelings were at the time, Louisa's perceptions were not, and could not be, blunted to the discernment of the fearful physiognomy of such a countenance. The sense that Lord Rockforest was pursuing her—the horror which she felt towards him after the consciousness of her sister having been made away with—the sight of the body taken from the river—the recollection of some dreadful secret having been in the custody of

Eustace Mildmaye—the lonesomeness of the place—and the sight of the ominous face of the woman Ullathorne, so suggestive of evil, — all coming together, completely overpowered her. Exhausted and frightened, she sank fainting at the very moment when Lord Rockforest reached her side.

CHAPTER VI.

In former times, as we observed, the Mildmayes had often amused themselves with picturing how they would feel, and how they would act, if placed in tragical situations. They never supposed that any possible dispensation of events could place them both simultaneously in circumstances of a most startling character. Yet the situation in which they both found themselves was of no sudden contrivance. On the contrary, it had been prepared for them from a long time. The web of fate had been weaving for them during months past, without their ever being conscious of what was in preparation for them. We shall see how this strange doom had been so

gradually stealing around them, and we shall, therefore, resume the narration of what befel Caroline Mildmaye, who was left in the mausoleum of Lady Rockforest.

How long Caroline had been out of her senses, or in a state between a trance and a dream, it would have been impossible for herself to have told. On coming to her full recollection, about sixteen hours afterwards, the first thing that she was conscious of was that she was in a strange bed-chamber. She found herself lying in a large four-post bed, whose posts were curiously gnarled, and worked into many quaint devices. The room in which she was lying was antiquely furnished, and the first dim recollection of what happened her last were forced upon her perception by the look of the furniture of the room. At first she thought it was a dream; then her mind wavered to a sense of its being real, and her senses were hovering in a suspended state between dozing and waking, when the door opened slowly, and a female form entered the room. There was not much light at the

time; the blind of the window had been half down, but the objects in the apartment were perfectly discernible.

The person thus entering stood a few paces from the bed, and looked in the direction of Caroline. She was dressed like a servant, in a cotton gown; and somehow or other Caroline fancied that she remembered to have seen her before. The figure paused for a while, and stood fixedly gazing on Caroline Mildmaye, who remained quite motionless, and who really felt as if she was in a dream. Then after the lapse of a few moments the figure receded, and retired from the room.

"Is this a dream?" thought Caroline to herself. "Am I awake? Good God! where am I?" and she rose in the bed, only to fall back through weakness. Then, like the phantasms of some horrible remembrance, some of the events of the last night rushed before her mind, and a partial sense of her actual situation dawned upon her mind. The antique furniture—the old chairs—the faded carpet—the dressing-table—the hangings of the windows,—all suggested the strange house

into which she had been carried with such violence. Again she sat up in the bed, and as the recollection of the dreadful scene in the vault came before her mind, a feverish sensation fell upon her. Her terror increased with her recollection, and she jumped wildly from her couch and staggered across the room to the window.

Though quite unconscious of ever having been undressed, she beheld her clothes lying on a chair against the wall, and some of them folded smoothly upon an old walnut chest of drawers. She was clad in a loose night-dress far too long and wide for her person, covered all over with a profusion of fantastically executed needlework. The nightcap that had been upon her head fell off as she rose from the bed, and it was impossible for her to avoid observing the richness of the materials of which it was composed.

But her mind, in a fever, left her no leisure to dwell even for a moment on such trifles. She staggered as she tried to walk across the room. Her nerves seemed to fail her as she strove to use her limbs, which were entangled in the long folds of

the night-dress which she wore. With difficulty she made her way across the room in the direction of the window, anxious to look out on the scene around, in order to wake up her thoughts to a sense of reality.

The first object that met her view was the sight of the lofty wooded hill that rose in a cone-like shape behind the house at Catesby Court. Between the hill and the house lay an old neglected garden, with long straight fish-ponds, and yew hedges, and thick rows of box. An air of ruin, combined with the desolation of solitude, imparted a singularly dreary aspect to the view that met the eyes of Caroline Mildmaye. She had never seen it before, of course, but the recollection of Lady Rockforest, of her menacing voice, and her strange demeanour, were painfully present to the memory of Caroline Mildmaye, and she had not then the least doubt that it was in the gloomy mansion of Catesby Court that she was confined.

"Oh, Eustace! Eustace!" she cried, "it is you who are the cause of all this. Why did you not warn me of what was

before us? You must have known what was impending. Your terror, your doubts, your vacillation, all appear now to be justified. And yet you were silent, though you knew some dreadful crime had been committed, or was about to be performed."

And then the recollection of her mother's coffin, which had so long been missing, and which had been seen by her last night in the mausoleum intended for the reception of Lady Rockforest's body, came across her memory, and convulsed her even to tears. The profanation of her beloved mother's remains, the wickedness of Lady Rockforest, the criminal audacity of her whole conduct, the horror of her appearance, and the sight of that drear and awful garden, over which the evening shades were then stealing and casting deeper shadows on the ground interspersed with the yew-trees, all these things combined to freeze the soul of Caroline Mildmaye. The weird look of the funereal landscape from the windows, even more than the recollection of the antecedents of her sojourn in that dreadful place, all com-

bined to frighten her with exceeding power.

Then by degrees her senses gradually began to awaken to a more acute sense of the dangers by which she was surrounded. Each and all of the particulars of the last memorable night came one by one upon her with sharp distinctness. The recollection of Mrs. Ullathorne's eyes and their sinister expression, and her questioning as to "whether she was a manor a woman," all came trooping across the tortured recollection of Caroline Mildmaye. She trembled and shook with fear as the image of the stranger with the pale face and dark glittering eyes came to her remembrance. All the figures in the dark drama, and the sense that Eustace Mildmaye was cognisant of some dreadful mystery, came vividly across her mind.

After having been for some time immersed in these reflections, as she gazed out upon the dismal garden that spread before the window of the apartment in which she was confined, she turned round to look more closely at the room. She

passed by the side of an old toilet-glass on the dressing-table near the window, and was involuntarily struck with the change in her appearance. Once before she had seen herself look so wasted and haggard, after having been for several days in a fever. Then she had been almost equally haggard, and her cheeks just as sunk and pale. She was equally weak now as then, and was hardly able to continue standing long.

But as she stood gazing at her altered countenance, she heard a rapid step advancing outside the door of her chamber. All the horror that she experienced the night before was immediately renewed in all its terrible intensity. Nor was it in any wise diminished as the door opened, and the gaunt form of Lady Rockforest stalked into the room.

"Ah! ha! pretty Miss Caroline Mildmaye! So you are thinking of making your toilet. I came to see whether you were thinking of getting up. Well, it is no wonder that you should be tired after having got to bed so early this morning.

Your visit to your mother did not seem to——"

"Oh, Lady Rockforest!" cried Caroline, "you have outraged the dead—you have profaned the tomb—you have——" And, choked with emotion as the sense of the insult offered to her mother's remains came with fresh force to her mind, Caroline burst into convulsions of tears.

"Pooh! what signify your tears to me!" cried Lady Rockforest. "Your execrable mother attainted my name before the most heartless tribunal in the world—the West End of London. She turned informer against me, when she chanced to find out by an accident that I had an intrigue with Jack Wilmot—the father of that Mr. Wilmot whom your coquetting sister jilted. I am sure that I was not worse than other people. I was not half so bad as Lady ——, or Mrs. ——" (and the fierce peeress named two persons whose characters had been tarnished in the scandals of forty years previously). "Nay, for that matter, I was much better than your vile, hateful, and treacherous mother."

And in the paroxysm of passion Lady Rockforest presented a truly horrible appearance. Her face blanched, while she knit her hands together and ground her teeth. Then suddenly, with a frantic shriek, she seized Caroline by the arm, and dragged her towards the window, saying,

"Yes! let me feast my eyes upon you now, as I make you expiate the misery that your mother caused me."

"Oh, madam! spare me—spare me—mercy—mercy—help——"

"Silence your screams, you foolish thing," said Lady Rockforest, as she drew her towards the light. "In an instant I could——"

"Murder! murder!" screamed Caroline, as, perfectly terrified, she anticipated immediate violence, and saw the passion-torn countenance of Lady Rockforest becoming contorted with rage.

"I could dash you from that window if I chose," said Lady Rockforest, "but I am reserving you for a sweeter revenge. Oh! I gloat over the way in which I shall make the daughters of the cursed Mary

Mildmaye expiate the crimes of their mother. You shall both be married. If I had meant anything worse than marriage against you I could have had it accomplished last night, when I had you in my oratory; but I recollected that, like myself, you were born a gentlewoman, and I have reserved you for honourable wedlock. It may be a little compulsory, but what of that? I was made to marry Arthur Tucker, whether I liked him or not. And I shall choose a husband for you."

"Oh, madam! oh, Lady Rockforest!" faintly moaned Caroline.

"Ay! I gloat over it," continued the desperate woman, whose aspect was then fearful to look upon, as her livid countenance gleamed with satanic delight. "But you little know, simpleton, how sweet is my revenge. Your sister Louisa shall be married to a man who is no more Lord Rockforest than he is the Duke of Norfolk. Yes! and they shall find it out too late. Yes! curses upon Eustace Mildmaye for having found out my secret! but at least I shall have the pleasure of

seeing your sister stripped of her coronet when it is too late to repent. She shall be wedded to a man who is no more my son than he is yours, and after being raised to the nobility, she shall again find herself reduced to——"

At this moment the door was burst open, and in rushed Mrs. Ullathorne, who strode across the room with fury in her looks. She seized Lady Rockforest, and dragged her away from Caroline, and forced the unhappy peeress into a large chair.

"Now, I told you," cried Mrs. Ullathorne, addressing herself to Lady Rockforest, "not to do this. I told you again and again to beware how you acted. Recollect——"

And as Mrs. Ullathorne pronounced the last word, she drew herself up to her full height, and holding out her right hand, assumed a strangely menacing demeanour. Then turning round she glanced at Caroline Mildmaye, and pointing to her forehead, tapped it significantly, as if to intimate that the mind of Lady Rockforest was affected. Then, in a calmer tone, she said,

"Your ladyship had better retire and compose yourself."

"Keep your distance, I say," cried Lady Rockforest; "do not address me in that manner."

"Come, come, do not get into the tantarums," said Mrs. Ullathorne, in a half-soothing tone; "we cannot afford that just now."

"I tell you to leave me alone, woman—my curse upon you all!" screamed out Lady Rockforest, attempting to rise from her chair. But Mrs. Ullathorne held her down in it by sheer force, and a violent struggle ensued between the unfortunate peeress and herself. While Lady Rockforest raged, Mrs. Ullathorne stormed, and language passed between them both which was fit only for Bedlam to hear, from the horror of its imprecations.

But this rival burst of fury was not of long continuance. The sound of rapid footsteps in the gallery outside drew off the attention of Mrs. Ullathorne, and the noise of voices in altercation was heard outside the door, which was half opened in a few minutes, but Mrs. Ullathorne ran

towards it, and tried to shut the parties out. While doing so, the terror of Caroline Mildmaye was extreme. She heard a strange man's voice pronouncing her name, and she heard also the accents of a voice that sounded familiarly, as if crying, "Spare her, sir—spare the lady!" But the confusion of the scene, the suddenness of the approach of the strangers outside, added to her weakness, completely bewildered Caroline. The door again was burst open, but the man, whoever he was, could not force his way in. He seemed struggling to enter, but he was jostled and held back by Mrs. Ullathorne and another woman. Lady Rockforest, still in a towering rage, strode out to the door, and, pushing it further open, revealed to the affrighted Caroline the sight of the stranger struggling between Mrs. Ullathorne and another female.

"The bride is not ready yet for the bridegroom!" cried Lady Rockforest, with an air of authority, and pressing the man backwards. "Patience—patience—or else all will be spoiled."

Then the violence of the man returned,

and in the very height of the altercation the female, whose face Caroline remembered, though she could not then recollect her name, contrived to jostle away the stranger, and forced the door out against his face, and bolted it from the inside, having herself entered into the chamber. The exertion to which she had been subjected made her pant and breathe violently, and, though she was much exhausted with the struggle, she succeeded in fastening the door firmly, so as that ingress was not possible.

Scarcely had she succeeded in shutting the door than the woman turned rapidly round towards Caroline Mildmaye, and burst into tears. She sobbed convulsively, and, falling on her knees before Caroline, testified the greatest anguish.

"Oh! Heaven forgive me for all my sins against you and your family! But I never thought that it would come to this." And her voice was choked with a fresh burst of emotion.

Caroline was greatly surprised, even in the midst of all her distress, at this extraordinary manifestation of feeling in one

whose face and person were not at once recognised by her, though she had a vague feeling that she had seen them somewhere before.

While the woman was sobbing at her feet, the noise of the altercation outside the door gradually ceased, and the sound of retreating footsteps intimated that the party who had wished to enter the room had, for the time at least, desisted from the intention of doing so.

"Oh! Miss Caroline—can you ever forgive me for the cruel part I have taken in injuring you? Oh! miss—I never thought that such terrible mischief could come from my writing those letters to Lady Rockforest."

While the woman before her broke out thus into passionate lamentations, Caroline vainly endeavoured to think where she had seen her. Her face was concealed from her at the moment, and her name she was unable to recal, but the tones of her voice were familiar to her ear; yet, whether she had been one of her father's servants, or of the numerous train in the employment

of the St. Pierre family, Caroline could not then recollect.

"Who and what are you?" asked Caroline, eagerly, experiencing at the same time some relief in finding that any one was near her who showed any sympathy for her.

The woman uncovered her face, and, though it was distorted from crying, Caroline at once recollected the appearance of Mary Crowder, a servant of Mrs. St. Pierre's, whom Caroline remembered having been dismissed from her service only a few days before the news had come to London of Eustace Mildmaye having been so ill. She was the same person that Mrs. St. Pierre, as our readers may remember, had suspected of eavesdropping at Belvyddyr.

Caroline was much astonished at seeing Crowder before her, and also at her evident sorrow and alarm.

"For God's sake, help me," cried Caroline, eagerly addressing her. "If you mean well, and are not in league with those who have insulted me, I ask you to aid me in escaping from them."

The woman Crowder only sobbed violently in answer to this appeal. She tried to speak, but her words were inarticulate, and Caroline could not at first catch their meaning. The grief in which Crowder seemed to show her apparent compunction for having done something injurious to Caroline, and the sense of apprehension by which she appeared to be influenced, increased the trepidation of Caroline Mildmaye, and made her feel that her position was dreadfully serious. The first words that she could catch from the lips of Crowder left no doubt upon it.

"Oh, miss! I never thought when I was playing the part of a spy upon you, that I would ever have been the means of doing you any harm. It was I who wrote the letters to Lady Rockforest, telling her all about you and your sweet sister, Miss Louisa Mildmaye. It was I who repeated all the conversations I heard between you and Mrs. St. Pierre, about your not liking Sir Vaughan Gwynne, and your attachment to your cousin; and also at another time, how you declined to listen to Lord Rockforest's courting you. Oh, Miss Caro-

line! indeed, indeed, I had no intention then of doing you any harm. I never thought that I could be the cause of doing you such mischief." And Crowder burst into more passionate exclamations of grief than before.

The language of Crowder, her confession about having been a spy, the sense that her actions had been secretly watched and her conversations repeated, all added to the bewilderment of Caroline Mildmaye. More than ever she was convinced that her position was excessively alarming, and a conviction seized her that some dreadful crime was meditated against her.

The partial revelations, also, that had fallen from Lady Rockforest about Louisa's being married to "a man who was no more Lord Rockforest than he was the Duke of Norfolk," added to the consternation of Caroline. Then she began to realise the depth of the mystery and secrets which had been weighing upon her cousin Eustace. Yet all was confusion in her mind, and the only clear impression that remained was the consciousness that her position was desperate.

"Who is it," she cried to the woman Crowder, "that has thus assailed me? Tell me the whole truth, I implore. For God's sake, do not deceive me. I am but a weak woman; have pity on me, and help me in this peril. Is it Lady Rockforest who is at the bottom of all this?"

"Oh, miss! there are dreadful goings on in this house; it's an awfully wicked place. Curses on the day on which I ever entered into the pay of Lady Rockforest. But there's others than she, and 'tis he and she who are driving on this business."

"Merciful God!" cried Caroline, agonised more and more at every word that came from Crowder, "look down on me. Oh! what sin have I committed that I should merit this fate?" And as she gazed on the weeping face of Crowder, and beheld the woman's evident alarm, the mind of Caroline became almost frenzied with torturing misery. She walked rapidly about, perfectly distracted. Her mind was lashed into a frenzy, and she was quite incapable of joining her ideas.

"Crowder, for Heaven's sake, what am I saying? Yes! let us go at once; we

can set out together. Open the door at once, and let us be off. Why do you stop? Open the door—follow me." And Caroline, not knowing what she was saying, ran to the door, but it was fastened on the outside. She ran to the window, and the height from the ground showed how little chance there was of escape on that side. She gasped for air, and in a whirl of contending sensations, she cast herself helplessly upon the bed, just as there was a fresh knocking at the door, when Crowder went to open it.

CHAPTER VII.

On the door being opened, Mrs. Ullathorne entered again, to Caroline's great alarm.

"Crowder, go down stairs. What's this? You have been weeping?" said she, on noticing the signs of emotion visible in the countenance of Crowder. Then, lowering her voice, and drawing the servant woman aside, she spoke to her in a whisper, and apparently in a threatening way, as Crowder dropped her eyes and turned aside from Mrs. Ullathorne. In a moment or two Crowder left the room.

As the door closed after her, Caroline turned with increased anxiety towards Mrs. Ullathorne. The latter waited till Crowder's footsteps died away, and she

then turned round to speak to Caroline. Her aspect was far from being as threatening as when she had been first seen by Caroline Mildmaye. She seemed to have put on a more winning way, and though it was possible that she had become more deeply malignant, still even the appearance of courtesy on her part was less dreadful to Caroline than the terrible aspect which Mrs. Ullathorne had worn at first.

"Sit down, Miss Mildmaye. Do not be alarmed," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "I am not so dreadful as I look. Nay—nay—do not look so frightened, child. I am not going to murder you."

Caroline, though faint and feeble, still found strength to support her dignity of character, and her courage was roused with something of the energy of despair. Collecting her strength, she said,

"I know not who you are or what you are. But such outrages as you have inflicted on me cannot be done with impunity in England. If you wish to murder me, you can do so. I have no strength to combat yourself or your associates; and

if you mean that or worse crimes, I can tell you that they will not pass unseen. My friends are powerful, and punishment shall fall on the guilty parties even in this world."

"My dear young lady," said Mrs. Ullathorne, "there is not the least occasion for alarm. There is no occasion for trembling, or for fearing evil consequences."

"Then why am I dragged here? Why am I——"

"Hush! hush! Many beautiful young women before now have got capital husbands under less favourable auspices. You shall be married to the brother of a lord," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "That is for what you are wanted here. Now don't be angry."

"It's imposture—it's crime—it's a wicked attempt to outrage me," said Caroline.

"Nay! I tell you that a lord's brother——"

"No member of a noble family—no! nor of an honest peasant's family, would plot to ruin a woman in such a position."

"Pooh! child, your case is not half so

bad as that of Miss Heathcote, who had to marry Lord Furzlee—the poor Scotch lord—against her will, or of Lady Lucy Trevor, who was run away with thirty years ago, and is now Viscountess Woodborough."

"It is impossible that I am thus to be outraged in this free country. Oh! whoever you may be, do not, do not lend yourself to wicked deeds. I never did any harm to Lady Rockforest—I never injured her in any way. Why, then, should I be seized on thus?"

"Because one of the handsomest men in England, and the brother and son of lords, is deeply in love with you."

"It's a story. It's some wretched impostor—it's——"

And just then the recollection of the words that fell from Lady Rockforest came to Caroline's recollection. She remembered that Lady Rockforest had said that "Lord Rockforest was no more a peer than that he was Duke of Norfolk." The consciousness that she was for the moment completely in the power of whatever persons had taken her away, the conviction that Ullathorne was imposing on her

in saying that the brother of a peer was instrumental in carrying her off, and attempting to marry her by force, and, above all, the recollection of the secret which tortured Eustace Mildmaye, all these considerations overwhelmed her, and left her almost prostrate before Mrs. Ullathorne.

"Oh!" cried Caroline to Mrs. Ullathorne, "save me—save me from the conspiracy that has been made against me. What have I ever done to you that you should enter into league against me? I am innocent of aught against Lady Rockforest. I never spoke against her at any time. She says that I tried to discover her secrets, but it is not the case."

"Ah! you mean to say," said Mrs. Ullathorne, "that your cousin, the clergyman, never told you the secrets which he found out in this house?" And as Mrs. Ullathorne uttered these words, the former expression of ferocity returned to her countenance, and her demoniacal aspect was enough to terrify any one.

"Oh! I solemnly declare that I know of no secret from my cousin's lips—he

never told me any—I declare, before my Maker, that I know of nothing affecting any one in this house or elsewhere."

"Impudent, audacious thing that you are!" said Ullathorne, raising her voice to its loudest tones, "will you dare to deny to my face that your cousin Eustace had promised to tell you the other day a certain great secret which had been weighing upon his mind? Did he not even invite you into the road in order to tell it to you? Did he not, on two different occasions, put it off? Ha! you tremble, and well you may do so for attempting to deceive me with that sweet, hypocritical face, as sentimental and as false as that of the paralytic parson that you never shall marry."

The vehemence of Mrs. Ullathorne stunned Caroline, and the sight of her dreadful face distorted with passion cowed her. The allusion to Eustace, and the recollection, which had escaped her in the confusion of her mind, that he had offered to reveal the secret, confounded her still more, while the knowledge possessed by Mrs. Ullathorne upon the fact of Eustace having offered to reveal it, almost com-

pletely overpowered the spirit of Caroline Mildmaye, and she did not require the bodily presence of Mrs. Ullathorne before her to feel that her situation was most desperate.

Thoroughly exhausted, she sank upon her knees, while torrents of tears rushed from her eyes. There was no help at hand. It was the still evening hour. The autumnal night had closed in. Ullathorne's form was grim and gaunt by her side, and resistance was out of the question. The recollection of some dreadful deeds of violence, of which she had heard and read, were fearfully present to her mind, and she quailed as the shades of a dark fate lowered around her. A strange and unearthly sensation was over her, and she almost felt as if she was disembodied, as if her existence was reduced to nothing but spirit. She then knew what few persons ever experience, and only for once in their lives, the dreadful intensity of the first shock of terror. She felt as if something was rushing at her, and she longed that she could soar away from its reach. Her excitement and her horror, her trem-

bling body and her vehement fear, and the dreadful consciousness that danger was at hand, and could not be escaped from, gave her that original feeling of something entirely unlike what has ever before been experienced in life, which constitutes the chief sublimity of terror.

"Ha!" said Ullathorne, on seeing her thus prostrated, "you seem to forget that last night, or early this morning, you were thinking that I was a man. Ha! ha! ha! how terrified she looks!"

And Caroline *was* terrified; and again the thought came upon her that the person Ullathorne was a man. Her look of distress and suffering at that instant would have raised compassion even in the most obdurate.

"You are not, my young lady," continued Ullathorne, "the person to talk in a threatening way. You were never meant to frighten people. You look too frightened yourself to put fear into others."

"Oh! do have pity on me. Surely," cried Caroline, "you will not do me any——"

"Why, my dear child, you are only going to be married. Ay, and to the brother of a lord. What a shame for you to be crying! But all women cry on going to be married. I did so myself. Ha! ha!"

There was something peculiarly fearful in the hard mirth of Mrs. Ullathorne, who seemed to relish the consternation which Caroline now hardly cared to conceal.

"Before this time to-morrow you shall be the wife of a lord's brother," continued Ullathorne, "and I came to tell you to get ready. No tears are wanted. They detract from the loveliness of your beauty. Come, come, do not look so truly miserable. I must get you some refreshment."

And Mrs. Ullathorne turned away to pull the bell, but it did not appear to ring. She then prepared to leave the room.

"You need not be alarmed while I am away. I shall send you up some refreshment, and I shall take care that no one shall come in to you." And Mrs. Ullathorne retired at once, locking the door carefully after her.

It was then nearly completely dark. The daylight had almost departed, and Caroline felt chilled in her body, while a feverish heat had seized her head. She heard the retreating footsteps of Mrs. Ullathorne as she descended the stairs. She paced round the room distracted, and her mental agony bordered on madness.

A rush of wild, incongruous notions passed through her mind. If she had tried to collect her ideas the feat would have been impossible. She could not sit or stand still, and when she tried to pray she was unable to compose herself, and an awful sense of being deserted by Heaven came over her mind.

After having been for some time in this tortured state, she became conscious that some person or persons were approaching her chamber. The noise of several footsteps and of whispering voices frightened her still more; but before she had time for pondering on what she might expect, a key turned in the door, and the figure of the servant she had seen at the vault on the night before was visible, accompanied by Crowder, bearing a tray and some re-

freshments. As Crowder was coming into the room, Caroline was struck by the look upon her countenance full of suggestive meaning.

"Light a fire there, Bess, and be quick," said Crowder to the other servant; "this room is dreadfully cold." And in a few minutes the apartment was made to wear a more comfortable appearance under the influences of light and heat. Candles were placed upon the table, the fire was put into a blaze, and the curtains were drawn across the windows. While the other woman was settling the fire, Crowder approached the table near where Caroline was standing, and made a motion with her right hand to indicate that she had something particular to bring before Caroline's mind. She put her finger to her lip, and gave a significant turn of her head towards the other girl.

But the latter turned quickly round, and closely watched the movements of Crowder, who carefully avoided betraying herself by any gesture, and said, carelessly, "All right, Bess; the fire will be in a blaze in a minute." And again the woman

turned round to the grate, when Crowder significantly cast her eyes on Caroline, and rapidly drawing from her bosom something wrapped up in a paper, thrust it into Caroline Mildmaye's hand, with a gesture to preserve silence.

Even then, amidst the sense of peril that haunted her, the idea of having found a friend in any guise gave vast relief to Caroline Mildmaye's strained mind. In a few moments, after bustling round the room, the two servants left, the strange woman staring at Caroline closely before leaving. The tea-things were set upon the table, with some cold fowl, and as the fire blazed up and the candles lighted the room, Caroline recovered something of her strength.

But she could not fail to remark how carefully they locked the door after them. As their steps withdrew and sounded in the distance, Caroline eagerly drew out the small packet handed to her by Crowder. It was a key wrapped up in a small piece of white paper. She read upon the paper:

"Enclosed is a key of your door. As the clock strikes nine, open it, all will then

be quiet for an hour, and it is your only chance of escape. Descend the stairs and turn to the left: pass along the corridor to the end, and you will see a window opening on the grass. I shall be there to receive you. It is your only chance. Burn this in the fire."

And then there was written after it, "Drink some wine."

Though conscious that even this offer of help was but additional evidence of her extreme peril, Caroline's spirits rose considerably. The clock just then struck, and she counted eight. An hour was before her for making the trial, and she knelt down and prayed with fervour for help and aid, and at this time her mind was certainly more composed than before. Rising from her knees, she could not help feeling the sense of exhaustion, and even to swallow the tea that she poured out was an effort. Yet the warmth of the room cheered her somewhat, and the circulation of her blood was considerably restored. But a strange delirious sense was over her mind, and she felt herself in a fever of apprehension.

Would she be able to escape? What could Crowder do for her? Might she be depended upon? These and many other similar questions rushed through her mind, and she answered them from time to time in a variety of ways. Even then, amidst the wanderings of her reason, her thoughts would recur to Eustace Mildmaye, and she would upbraid him for his secrecy in concealing the danger which impended over her and him. An awful sense, also, of the extraordinary knowledge possessed by Lady Rockforest made her shudder with a feeling as if some supernatural influences were employed for her destruction.

It was in feelings like these, in which every minute was like an age of torture, that Caroline heard the clock strike nine. The house was then quiet, though the sounds of some slight noise had a few minutes before reached her. Desperate from terror of her situation, Caroline felt herself at the last moment impelled by a wild impulse of spasmodic strength to make one effort for her escape. After taking a little wine she unlocked the door cautiously, and stole silently out on the

lobby, listening attentively to catch the slightest sound.

She crept along the lobby to the top of the same staircase that she had traversed the night before. There was no noise to break the silence of the night. With a light foot Caroline descended the stairs, listening anxiously at every step. She soon reached the lower lobby, and, following the instructions of Crowder, turned along the corridor to the left.

With noiseless tread she was traversing its length, when she heard a door suddenly open, and the sound of several voices. Her first instinct was to run back as fast as she possibly could. Then she recollected that it would only be rushing on destruction, as the room would be sure to be visited before long. She could hear the voice of Mrs. Ullathorne loudly speaking in her angry tones. Nearer and nearer came the voices. Then there was a light, showing that they were coming out of one of the side-wings of the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

In this emergency Caroline darted into a room at her left hand, of which the door was partially ajar. The embers of a fire were in the grate, and the further part of the room was shrouded in close darkness. Instinctively she ran into the darkness, and concealed herself in the furthest corner of the chamber. Nearer and nearer came the voices.

"Come into the long parlour here," said a strange voice, "and we shall have our wine here. The draught at the other side of the house would freeze one."

And the door of the room in which she had sought shelter was then entered. But as the greater part of the chamber was

shrouded in darkness, Caroline's person escaped the notice of the man who had come in.

"Is there any one here?" he cried, in a rough, coarse voice, and as he asked the question, Caroline almost gave herself up for lost. The person carrying the light had not yet entered into the room, and Caroline had barely time to retreat as fast and as noiselessly as she could to the extremity of the chamber, which was of much greater length than she had supposed. A large, dark object, apparently like a screen or a bureau, came out from one of the walls, and she glided towards it for concealment. She had scarcely reached it when Mrs. Ullathorne and another person entered the room, and the light of a lamp, carried by Mrs. Ullathorne in her hand, made the objects and persons in the room quite visible.

Caroline found that she had taken momentary refuge neither behind a screen nor a chest of drawers. A set of tables had been rolled out of the way and turned up, and it was behind one of these she stood.

She held her breath, though her heart

beat violently, as she listened to the sound of her own name. A chink in the jointure of the leaves of the table enabled her to see the parties that had come, and the sight that met her eyes was calculated to increase her terror. The first person she recognised was the stranger, whom she had seen on the night before, and who had more than once attracted the attention of Louisa and herself. He was apparently under the influence of drink. His face was flushed, and his eyes were bright with excitement. He held in his hand a large decanter of wine, which he placed on the middle of the table, and flung himself down into an old chair near the fireplace.

"Yes, parson," he cried, "'twill be one of the best jobs that you ever did, your splicing me, as we used to say at sea, with the lovely Caroline Mildmaye."

The person whom he so addressed was not entirely devoid of clerical appearance. There was an air of formalised gravity over his face that might have belonged to one professionally connected with the Church. But his blotched visage, and his fiery red

nose, and the dirtiness of his dress, would have suggested to any one who saw him for the first time, that the name of parson was merely a slang appellation. But Caroline had seen that odious face before. It belonged to a broken clergyman, of the name of Sawyer (once before mentioned in this story), a person of singularly unhappy fortunes. He had been infected with the passion for gaming, and in one of the moments of temptation had forged the name of an officer absent in India. The affair, though it never passed before a court of law, had transpired, and for some nominal charges of another kind, the ecclesiastical authorities took the opportunity of depriving him of his gown. Since then he had led a desperate existence, connected with the worst characters, and his appearance in the neighbourhood where he had once been respected, was looked upon with fear. His name was held up *in terrorem* to the young, as a warning, and the "wretched Dick Sawyer" was proverbial for many miles round Dryford.

"Let your reverence sit down," said Mrs. Ullathorne, "and have a glass of

wine, after your cold journey from town." And Mrs. Ullathorne rang for glasses.

Caroline had cause to quail at seeing this dreadful group before her. Their conversation was well calculated to make her quiver with fear. She could see the faces of the two men plainly, but the woman Ullathorne sat with her back towards her.

"Egad!" cried Sawyer, "I was astonished when you sent me your letter, Jack. I got it last night, and I never could have come if you had not enclosed the ready to me. Tell me all about it, my lad. But you know that I do not want to put myself in the power of the law."

"As sure as my name is Jack Ullathorne," said the stranger, who thus revealed his relationship to not the least wicked of the party, "you shall never have reason to regret your job of to-night. A cool hundred for marrying a dashing fine fellow like me to a splendid girl like Caroline Mildmaye, is capital payment."

"Why, you do not mean to tell me that she is in the house?"

"Isn't she? I have her safe up-stairs in the old blue bedroom, and I'll marry

her this very night, if your reverence sees no lawful objection. Take your wine."

"But you have not the lady's own consent," said Sawyer, jocosely.

"Ha! ha! That's good. That's the best thing I have heard this twelvemonth. Why should not I marry her just as well as Lord Rockforest marry her sister?"

"Simply," cried Sawyer, "because one is a peer of the realm, and the other is—ahem!—ahem!—is——"

"Well, well," cried Jack Ullathorne, fiercely—"is what?"

"Why, man, I tell you," said Sawyer, "not to talk at me in that bullying way. I say the other is Jack Ullathorne, *alias*——"

The face of Ullathorne became fearfully clouded, and seizing up a glass of wine before him, he flung it, glass and all, at the head of Sawyer, accompanying it with a coarse oath.

"Ah, you silly fool!" cried Mrs. Ullathorne, "why do you break out in this fashion at such a moment? You'll spoil all with your violence."

"I wouldn't be my mother's son if I hadn't a dash of Old Nick in me," said Ullathorne. "What makes the fellow be so impudent to me? After sending him money, and offering him a good job, the least that he might do is to keep a civil tongue in his head."

"Well, Jack," cried Sawyer, wiping away the signs of the wine thrown on his dress, "I forgive you. It was only one of your eccentric ways, I suppose."

"Hang you!" said Ullathorne, "you shouldn't be so aggravating. I have as good a right to marry Caroline Mildmaye as that rascal Rockforest to wed her sister."

"To be sure you have, dear," said Mrs. Ullathorne, humouring him; "and you shall marry her this very night, and the parson here shall manage matters all right. Come, let your reverence fill your glass again, and let us drink the bride's health."

Just then a wailing shriek of Lady Rockforest's was heard not far off, as if the unfortunate peeress was coming in the

direction of the room where the party was seated.

"The old damsel still sings solo," observed the fallen clergyman, laughing.

"She does so every night, when she gets into what my mother here calls the tantarums," said Jack Ullathorne, laughing.

"Ha! ha!" echoed Mrs. Ullathorne, in chorus. "I hope the old sinner is not coming this way, to interrupt our talk."

"Well, she has got her revenge nicely, Sawyer," said Jack Ullathorne. "I believe I told you that Lady Rockforest's first tumble down stairs in high life was when the bride's mother found out that her ladyship had an intrigue with the celebrated Mr. Wilmot, the great wit and dandy——"

"Well, well," cried Sawyer.

"Yes! and then, out of revenge, Lady Rockforest swore an oath that she would hunt Mrs. George Mildmaye to death."

"And she did so," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "When Mrs. Mildmaye was near her confinement, one day, in a library at Brighton,

Lady Rookforest followed her into the shop, and abused her before all the people, and frightened the lady out of her wits. She died in childbirth that night."

"And that's not all," said Jack, "for she never was satisfied until she had her coffin——"

"Hush! here she comes," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "Why don't you drink the bride's health, gentlemen?"

"Caroline Mildmaye!" cried the disowned clergyman, standing up with the glass in his hand.

"Caroline Ullathorne!" said the man of the same name, at the other side of the table.

"Caroline the bride!" cried Mrs. Ullathorne.

As they were in the act of toasting the health the door opened, and in stalked the figure of the fallen peeress. Her face was lividly pale, and her great glittering eyes flashed with fire. She had scarcely crossed the threshold when she was seized with one of her racking coughs, and the group

around the table stood quietly looking on, while the form of Lady Rockforest was convulsed with spasmodic struggles.

As Lady Rockforest came into the room, Sawyer made her a low bow. She at first did not recognise him; and Mrs. Ullathorne said,

"Lady Rockforest, this is the gentleman that you wished to see. He came down from town as soon as he received John Ullathorne's letter."

"What! is this Mr. Sawyer? Let me see." And she took up the lamp from the table, and approached with it close to the degraded clergyman. She looked at him closely for a couple of minutes, and the light fell upon a countenance that too truly told the coarseness of the dissipation in which the wretched Sawyer strove to drown the recollection of other times.

"Well, Mr. Sawyer, you *are* changed. Truly I never should have known you. Ah! it is many years now since you and I met at Sir Harry Hinchinbroke's in Lancashire. How time has wagged with us

both since then!" And the miserable peeress sobbed.

"Ah! indeed, Lady Rockforest, it is an unlucky world.

'Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis.'"

"Come," said Jack Ullathorne, "give us cheerful talk, Sawyer, and do not be pattering that sort of lingo to the lady. We're going to be married, you know——"

"And you have forgotten to drink the bride's health," cried Mrs. Ullathorne. "Will not your ladyship join us?"

"Curses on her!" exclaimed Lady Rockforest, interrupting.

"Oh! oh!" said Sawyer; "do not curse a young bride."

"Curses on her mother, the execrable Mary Mildmaye," said Lady Rockforest. "It was she who——" And then Lady Rockforest broke into one of her imprecations of hatred and vengeance against the mother of the two "rival sisters" for having found out some secret scandal of her life, and revealed it to the world. Mrs.

Ullathorne drew her ladyship aside, and endeavoured to pacify her for the moment, which she did by reminding Lady Rockforest that she was now about to have vengeance for what she had endured, by marrying one of her daughters as she liked. When the name of the Mildmaye sisters was mentioned more than once, Sawyer suddenly said,

"By the way, as I was riding through Ashenbridge this afternoon, it was stated that the young clergyman, Eustace Mildmaye, was just at the point of death."

When the words of Sawyer fell upon the ears of Caroline, she felt as if Providence had suddenly deserted her, and, oblivious of the place where she was, a faint low moan involuntarily fell from her lips.

Scarcely had it done so, when her senses were at once roused to a full perception of the danger in which she stood. Faint as had been her weak ejaculation, its noise had reached the ears of the party round the table.

"What's that?" cried Jack Ullathorne, starting up. "Surely some one spoke."

"By George!" said Sawyer, "there's somebody in the room."

"Who's there?" cried Lady Rockforest, advancing one or two steps forward in the direction of the spot where Caroline was concealed.

Caroline then gave herself up hopelessly for lost. She trembled on her feet, and shook with alarm.

"It was somebody outside, perhaps," said Jack Ullathorne.

And during this moment of suspense the agony of Caroline was almost insupportable, while every instant she expected to be dragged from her hiding-place and brought into the full presence of the dreadful group assembled in that room. But by the merest accident a trivial circumstance arrested her discovery.

"Why, what are you talking of," said Mrs. Ullathorne; "it's only my little spaniel Flora just woke from her sleep." And at the same moment a large fat pug

dog jumped out of an arm-chair, and ran over to Mrs. Ullathorne.

"I hate all dogs," said Lady Rockforest. "I wish that you'd get rid of that nasty thing."

"Sure your ladyship knows," answered Mrs. Ullathorne, "that in order to please you all the dogs except this one have been removed. Even the bloodhound was sent miles off to Farmer Blacket's, because it used sometimes to bark in the night."

"It's a very bad thing not to have dogs in a house like this—so lonesome," said Sawyer.

"Ah! it may be a good thing too," said Jack Ullathorne, drily, and with a moody expression on his countenance.

"Well," said Lady Rockforest, "I thought that there was some one in the room; but come, shall we have the bride down stairs, or shall we go to her room? Perhaps, Mr. Sawyer, she'll want some spiritual advice before the ceremony is performed. Did you ever see her?"

"Oh! I have often seen Miss Caroline

Mildmaye and her lovely sister Louisa. They are, you know, the 'rival sisters.'"

"Ah!" said Lady Rockforest, "what pleasure it is to me to have Caroline in my grasp, and to see her married to your son, Mrs. Ullathorne, and to know that her sister is to be married to a man who is about as much——"

"Hish! hish!" said Mrs. Ullathorne, running over to her and putting her hand to Lady Rockforest's mouth; "leave Lord Rockforest and Louisa Mildmaye to settle their own affairs. Perhaps your ladyship had better now introduce the bridegroom to Miss Mildmaye. It may be just as well that she should be soothed down before the ceremony takes place, in order to show her that nothing very dreadful is intended."

"Stay—stay!" cried Sawyer. "I do not like putting myself in the power of the law, and I must know something more before——"

"Stop your palaver, parson," said Jack Ullathorne; "we can talk about that pre-

sently. You know that you *must* do me a service when I like." And Ullathorne leant with emphasis on the word "must," which he spoke in a bullying tone, that seemed completely to cow Sawyer.

"Yes," said Lady Rockforest, "the present would be a good moment for introducing the bridegroom to the bride. So come along with me, John Ullathorne, and I will introduce you myself."

"Do so by all means," said Mrs. Ullathorne, "and there will be less trouble afterwards in Parson Sawyer's performing the wedding ceremony." And Lady Rockforest, accompanied by John Ullathorne, left the room, and proceeded to where they supposed that Caroline Mildmaye was then confined.

CHAPTER IX.

SCARCELY had they left the room and were out of hearing, when Sawyer eagerly addressed Mrs. Ullathorne:

"I am so glad to be alone with you. This is a most dangerous business that Jack and you have embarked in——"

"Come, come," interrupted Mrs. Ullathorne, "it is too late now to flinch from the thing. If you knew all, you would see that it is our only chance. Do you act as Jack and I tell you, and all will be well. There is a secret in the business that you may know more about some day, parson."

"But I know it already. When Jack

was last in London, he let it out to me in his cups. He told me that Lady Rockforest got your son, the present Lord Rockforest, substituted for her own still-born child. He told me that she did it to balk the hopes of Lord Rockforest's brother, Noel Catesby, who never liked her. He told me that Lord Rockforest is no more entitled to his peerage and property than Jack himself. He told me how Lady Rockforest confessed it all to young Mildmaye, when she thought that she was on the point of death, and how sorry she was for having let out the secret; he told me, also——"

"Hang the fellow! he was an ass to have exposed his hand of cards to any one," said Mrs. Ullathorne, angrily; and then becoming calmer, she continued: "But I tell you what, Sawyer, do you stand our friend now in this business, and Jack and I will help you through life."

"But your project is a mad one," said Sawyer. "What possible use is it for Jack Ullathorne to commit abduction by

taking off Miss Mildmaye, and bringing both yourself and myself in as conspirators? We could be transported for it for life. You are perfectly mad to think of such a thing."

"How conceited you are in your own opinion, Mr. Parson. I tell you that you do not understand our game. Rockforest has turned against us; he says that there is no proof now existing but my word and Lady Rockforest's confession that Noel Catesby was tricked out of the inheritance. Whatever money Jack Ullathorne has squeezed out of Rockforest has gone in fifty ways; and let this old mad peeress die to-morrow—and she is not far from her long home—then Jack and I will be at the mercy of Rockforest."

"But how will carrying off Miss Mildmaye help you? It will only be putting yourself in the grasp of the law."

"Not a bit of it. Let the two Ullathornes marry the sisters, and they'll be only too glad to hush matters up when once they find out the state of the case.

I dare the Mildmayes—I dare the St. Pierres—ay, I dare the whole of them to touch a hair of the head of Jack and myself for taking off Miss Caroline Mildmaye, once that her sister Louisa is married to Rockforest."

"Faith, then," said Sawyer, "if what certain persons were talking of in London, before I came away, comes out in the journals, the other sister may bolt out of the course. It's plain enough to me," continued Sawyer, "that Jack Ullathorne and Lord Rockforest are veritable brothers; but Lord Rockforest carried it bravely, and concealed his pranks well." And then Sawyer entered on the report and rumours of fresh scandals and police-court revelations of a dark kind about Lord Rockforest.

Caroline heard this conversation with increased dismay. Here, then, was the secret which had weighed on the mind of Eustace! *He had learned it in what he considered as an auricular confession, at the time when there was no chance or even*

prospect of the Mildmaye girls being connected with the Rockforest family. Then, when he found that Louisa Mildmaye had actually accepted the hand of one whom he knew not to be a peer by right, the embarrassment of the young clergyman was extreme. His difficulties had further been increased by his own nervousness, and by the bullying adopted towards him by the Ullathornes, mother and son.

But Caroline Mildmaye had no time for thinking on this revelation of the secret, for a loud cry of distress came to the ears of those assembled in the room.

"What's that?" asked Sawyer, suddenly starting up and looking alarmed.

"There's something wrong," cried Mrs. Ullathorne, seizing the lamp and going out of the chamber. Sawyer accompanied her; and as they both left the room, and Caroline found herself on the point of being hunted like a hare, her terror became extreme, and a feeling of wild desperation took possession of her mind. Should she run at once out of the room? Or should

she wait for a while? Or—— But the noise of the returning steps made her draw back, and in a short time she heard the voices of the whole party as if they were coming back to the room where she was confined.

"Where's Crowder? Call Hawkins, Mrs. Ullathorne," cried Lady Rockforest. And then a clatter of noise and altercation made it impossible for Caroline to catch clearly what they were either saying or doing. But soon, over the whole Babel of sound, the noise of Jack Ullathorne's rage made itself audible:

"I've wound myself up to it, and sooner than that girl should escape me, I'd kill her, if necessary."

And then there was a furious speaking between them all, and great confusion; and Lady Rockforest and Mrs. Ullathorne cursed and swore in a manner that would have shocked Caroline Mildmaye, if she had not been in far too great terror about herself. The bells were rung with violence, doors were slammed, and the noise of feet

running up and down stairs suggested too faithfully to Caroline the great value attached by the conspirators to the possession of her person.

Before she could calmly consider what she should do, Ullathorne himself came into the room, bouncing with furious rage, and cried out,

"Let the whole house be searched from top to bottom. See by what way did she escape. Ha! I shall mount the sorrel horse and ride after her. No! I shall stay. Where the d——l should I ride after her. We'll send off to the lodges. Ha!"

And then he stopped as a light was brought into the chamber, and filled out half a tumbler of port wine, which he swallowed in a gulp. The wine which he had already been taking had, under the influence of excitement, flown up to his head, and he was talking quite thick. Caroline could not observe these matters; she cowered in her hiding-place, and was more terrified than ever as she heard the fearful

blasphemy of the wretch Ullathorne while he swore violently.

Suddenly Mrs. Ullathorne rushed into the room, and cried out,

"She must have got out through the end window in the left hall. I find it is open. Saddle one of the horses, John, and gallop up to the lodge as fast as you can. Hang it, don't be drinking wine, you fool."

A volley of oaths answered this appeal, and then Lady Rockforest raved incoherently, and Caroline had more than ever cause to apprehend the effect of being caught by Lady Rockforest, as she heard the wretched peeress exclaim,

"Her mother's daughter shall never escape these clutches." And she held out her hands, which at the time were contorted with the effect of the fury that was raging in her mind.

"Curse yourself, old lady," said the man Ullathorne. "You prevented me last night from managing matters in a way that would have set all right."

"Come, come," said Mrs. Ullathorne,

"don't be arguing now. She can't be far off, and we must catch her at once. She is not beyond the park wall. Ride off to the west gate, and I'll send down Dearsley to the other. We'll get out the servants and try and have her stopped."

"But perhaps she's not out of the house at all," said Sawyer. "Search it all round and see."

With difficulty the man Ullathorne was got away from the table, and he even staggered as he went out of the room. Lady Rockforest, Mrs. Ullathorne, and Sawyer appeared to keep together after they left the room, and Caroline heard them as they went to the hall-door, and found that it was shut. Then she heard the sound of more than one strange voice that had not fallen on her ear before, and angry expostulation and much vociferation took place between them, and she felt that if she were discovered just then, possibly the worst and most revolting of consequences would immediately befal.

Roused by dreadful anticipations, Caro-

line resolved to make another desperate effort for her safety. Without knowing well what she was going to do, she ran to the door of the apartment, and then stopped; and while trembling all over, she listened to the sounds of her persecutors. On the right was a passage leading to the hall and staircase, which she had descended. To the left was another passage, leading off apparently to the western wing of the mansion. She remembered hearing Mrs. Ullathorne say that she had shut down the window, which was at the end of the passage, and Caroline feared that she would not have strength to lift a window. Fierce with excitement, and desperate with the desire of safety, she rushed back again across the room, where she had found temporary shelter. She ran to the window of the apartment, which had not been concealed by any curtain, but which had simply a white blind to exclude the light. It was one of those old-fashioned ecclesiastical windows, which gave so much of a con-

ventual appearance to the house at Catesby Court. The middle portion of the window rose to a great height, and as Caroline drew aside the blind a burst of moonlight came upon her, and disclosed to her that she was looking upon the garden to the rear of the mansion.

All attempts to raise the sash of the window were vain. Its ponderous weight defied the exhausted strength of poor Caroline. But there were on either side of the middle sash two very small ones, so narrow that even if they could be raised it would have been scarcely possible for Caroline to have squeezed her way through either of them. She tried hard to raise the one at the right hand, but it would not lift up. Then maddened with terror, as she heard the voices of some of the people in the house coming nearer and nearer, she rushed to the small sash at the other side. Fortunately it could be lifted up. Without pausing for a moment, she forced herself through it, and jumped to the ground. As she did so the sash came down with a crash.

There were several trees in the garden, which threw deep shades upon the ground, and Caroline darted at once under the shade of one of the largest trees, not many yards from the house. The draught of fresh evening air was an immediate relief to her, utterly exhausted as she had been by the closeness of her previous confinement, and the sense of all that she had to escape from roused her mind to the most energetic resolve to struggle for safety. Scarcely, however, had she gained the shelter of the tree, and while still meditating in what direction she should turn, when she heard a door open close to the house, and voices of men in loud conversation with each other. She waited not to see who or what they were, but at once ran higher up the garden. There were gravelled walks and thick box hedges skirting on them, in the old style of gardening, and part of the pleasure-grounds had been laid out in shrubberies.

As she was dashing fast along, away from the house, and getting still more into

shelter from observation, one of the men gave a cry of "There—there she is!" When the hare on the hill-side hears the sound of the horses, and the yelling of the pack in full chase after it, its torture is little thought of by pursuers and spectators; but even that poor timid animal's sufferings were not so acute, or so intense in dire anticipations as those of Caroline Mildmaye, when she found herself hunted by the myrmidons in chase of her. Scarcely knowing what she did, she stole away as fast as she could by one of the walks that crossed the garden, and led in a different direction from that where the pursuers were. Then she came suddenly to a hill, upon which the trees did not cast so deep a shade, and her exhausted limbs were unequal to the labour of ascending it. Nearer and nearer came the men. She stopped behind a large holly-bush. She could see the glancing of a lantern, and could hear one fellow saying to the other, "I saw her, man—I saw her here." They were now following the very path by which

she had come. Before her was the hill, which she had not strength to ascend, and at one side of her was a high garden-wall, which even by day she could not clamber over. Between the wall and the garden was a sort of trench, or what might have been a watercourse in former times, which was tangled over with brushwood, and presented a dark appearance to the eye. So extreme was the alarm of Caroline, as the pursuers came along the walk near which she was standing, that she rushed for shelter into the trench, regardless whether it was shallow or deep, and not knowing whether it held water or not.

She had not time to think before the men came within a few feet of her. She could see the flashing of the lantern upon the garden-wall close by her side, and she could hear every word that was spoken by them in their coarse voices. As they closed up to where she was, she crouched more and more for shelter. The bottom of the trench was soft and muddy, and within three or four feet of her was a large dark

arch, which proved to be the mouth of a garden sewer. A gleaming of the light from the lantern shot through the brushwood under which she hid, and she crept as hastily as she could into this aperture, which sheltered her more from view than before. In another moment the footsteps of her pursuers were close to her, and she overheard one fellow say to the other,

"By gosh! Charley, twenty guineas apiece if we find her is too good a thing to let slip. I tell thee I saw her at the other side of the garden."

"You had a notion about it, man," said the other; "you thought as how you see'd her. She's off in the park by this time."

"Mr. Ullathorne will half kill us if we don't find her; he's in a tearing rage to-night. What's that there under the tree? There she is by——"

And away the man ran for a moment, and while Caroline lay panting in terror, she heard the sound of angry expostulation, as one fellow scolded the other for

his being deceived. She heard them vociferating eagerly, and she could even catch the sounds of the shrieking voice of Lady Rockforest from the house. She shivered with the effects of the cold atmosphere to which she was subjected, but the hope of escape still buoyed her up. But in a few minutes she heard the men coming back in the direction where she lay. She heard their voices, eagerly shouting to each other, and she trembled as she heard them alluding to her.

"Search up the wall there, Tom; she may be hiding there under that brushwood." And Caroline could see the glittering of the lantern not many feet from her.

"Ay, ay, my lad, that would be a good place to hide in. Odds zooks! there's something stirring, surely——"

"Where?—where?"

"Why, just down there in the trench, to be sure. Hallo, miss, we've got you at last."

And in the next minute she heard one of the men jump down into the trench.

"Come, miss, we have you——"

But the plash that he made in his descent told very plainly that he had jumped into a pool of water, and it seemed that he had got a much deeper soaking than he had calculated on.

"Hallo! hallo!" he cried; "lend a hand here, Jem, I'm down in a pit."

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared the other; "by jingo! thou hast got a fine sousing. Haw! haw! haw! hast thee got the twenty guineas by it?" And the noise of the merriment sounded strangely in Caroline's ears.

Then the fellow who had fallen into the water cursed and swore loudly, and was far from being thankful to his companion for his laughter.

"Stop your jeering," said he. "It will be a bad job for us if the girl has escaped. All our trouble, and the danger that we ran last night in helping Master Ulla-

thorne to take the girl off, will be a hot day's work, and we might get in the grip of the law, if Hawkins peached on us."

"That would be a bad job, indeed," answered his comrade; "but I do not think that there is any fear of Hawkins turning on us. At all events, if she does, we have her in our power as much as she has us."

"That would not help, if she was to turn informer, and Hawkins——"

Then Caroline could not distinguish what the fellow said about Hawkins, but it was evident to her that these two men were associated in her abduction, and by their mention of the name of "Hawkins," it was plain that Eustace Mildmaye's faithless servant had been in league with her abductors.

As they stood near the trench where Caroline was hiding, the light of the lantern constantly fell within a few feet of her, and she trembled lest every instant would reveal her position. Soon she heard one of the men say,

"They're calling us from the house.

Come, come, you can dry yourself inside better than here. Ha! there's Mr. Ullathorne's voice."

And soon Caroline recognised the voice of the man Ullathorne, and he was coming in the direction where she was hiding. He was soon by the side of the man.

"Well, well, you fellows, did you see anything of her?"

"No, please you, sir," said one of the men.

"Curse upon her, if I catch her she shall not soon escape from me. Well, well, hunt about the grounds all round the house, I'll gallop up to the gatehouse and see whether they have heard of her there."

And then she heard Ullathorne and the men retiring. She breathed freer as they were removed from her, and the hope of safety still clung to her mind as their retreating steps were faintly heard in the distance.

Still her position was most critical. She was weak in body, and she did not know

what route she should take for her escape, even if she was strong enough. Whether or not she should be able to get out of the garden was also extremely uncertain. As she heard the sounds of voices coming from the house, and as she listened to the rapid galloping of a horse, the sense of being pursued increased still more strongly the sense of her peril.

She lay quietly for some time, and it was not until the sounds of noise had comparatively died away that she ventured to stir. As she dragged her limbs out of the hole under the bank where she had found a temporary refuge, she felt herself weaker than she had supposed, and an utter sense of despair began to weigh her down. She crawled up to the walk that was parallel to the garden trench which ran along the wall, and without well knowing what she was about, she was miserable with the feeling of impending destruction. She stealthily crawled under dark trees, whose shadows screened her from all observation, and from time to

time she looked back upon the house. She saw lights flitting to and fro in various rooms of it, and they were evidently searching all the chambers. As the recollection of Lady Rockforest and the dreadful Mrs. Ullathorne came before her mind she felt appalled.

In some time she found herself at a corner where the garden-walls joined, and she was enabled to see the length and extent of the garden, which was of considerable size. The walk at the further top of it was open to observation from the house, as but few trees intervened. It was also raised some feet, and was a sort of terrace. She was afraid to expose herself to the chance of being seen, and hesitated about proceeding further in that direction.

While puzzled and bewildered as to what course she should adopt, she saw a ladder leaning against an upright fruit-tree. "Could I get over the wall with it?" was instantly suggested to her mind. Whether she could descend at the other side, and whither she would bend her steps, were

problems that she did not try to solve. An internal impulse urged her to get away if possible, and stealing guardedly to the tree, she tried to remove the ladder.

But for the energy inspired by terror, she could not, in the weak state of her body, have removed it. With some difficulty she contrived to change its position, and placed it against the wall. At the moment of doing so the noise of voices talking near the house fell upon her ear, and she fancied that persons were again entering the garden. Under this apprehension Caroline mounted the ladder as well as she was able, impelled by instinct to fly further and further from the scene where she had suffered such agony. She was in such a state of excitement, that she never reflected that if the ladder were found against the wall it would be the means of her being detected, and she never stopped to think how she should be able to alight on the other side. Wild with despair, she hastened up

the rungs; she had nearly reached the topmost one when the ladder swung to the side; Caroline snapped rapidly at the wall in order to try and sustain it, but down went the ladder with a crash, and she fell with violence upon the ground.

Her right arm and shoulder came with sharp force against the earth. As she tried to stand, a torturing pang ran through her foot, and she was scarcely able to raise it. In the fall of the ladder her left foot had awkwardly turned under, and she felt that she had severely hurt herself. The pain was most intense, and shot up through her weak and sensitive frame. She was unable to stand upright, and had to lie down against the wall.

As she thus saw all chance of escape cut off, she felt herself forlorn and deserted by Heaven. Her head sank upon her breast, and her hands were knit convulsively together. At times the pain in her foot made her writhe with torture, but the agony of her soul far exceeded the sufferings of her body.

And thus the night wore on, while Caroline lay upon a terrace-walk that overlooked the garden at the rear of Catesby Court. She could see now and again the lights moving from room to room in the dreary mansion where such a foul conspiracy had been made against her. The night was very cold, and as the wind soughed through the trees, and as no sound of rescue or comfort came to her ears, her heart began to sink, and hysterical tears would alternate with moments of horrible imaginings as to her future fate. She heard the hour of eleven strike, and every minute seemed to her an age. Not long after the hour of midnight the rattling of a horse's hoofs came to her ear. Nearer and nearer they came, and she felt that it must be Ullathorne coming back, after not having found her. She soon heard a coarse loud voice, apparently altercating in the yard, and her terror returned in its more fearful form.

Then all remained still, and, beyond the sound of an occasional imprecation, she

heard nothing in the direction of the house. The lights also seemed to have been put out, and all was still, when the screams of Lady Rockforest were borne to her ear, and the recollection of the midnight visit to the place where the wretched peeress was to be entombed, and where the body of Caroline's mother lay dishonoured, presented themselves before her with frightful reality. She almost fancied at one time that she was actually in the vault, and she screamed as the apparition of the dreadful peeress rose upon her imagination. 'Twas but fancy; but how horrible was the thought of the malignity with which Lady Rockforest was resolved to pursue the daughter of her old enemy!

Her presence of mind came back again, and not long after she had screamed she heard a door open, apparently in the garden, and she fancied that she could hear whispered conversation. Alas! she was then weak, exhausted, and lame, utterly incapable of flying from her ruthless pursuers. Soon the door was shut again, and all was

still. She strained her eyes, thinking to see a lantern approaching, but none such appeared. She remained as quiet as possible, and nestled under the wall, dreading every moment that some one would pounce upon her, but it seemed that whoever had opened the door had returned without advancing further.

And thus the night passed gradually away. Hour after hour tolled, and weaker and weaker grew the senses of Caroline Mildmaye. Fear, fatigue, and pain slowly did their work, and her mind wandered into unconsciousness, while her body was benumbed with the cold night air, and the dank vapours that exhaled from the close hedges and spread in that old garden. Sometimes a faint appeal to Heaven—an aspiration to God—passed through her heart; then for a brief interval a sense of her situation would come with reality to her mind, and as her heart quivered with terror, her senses would reel, and a strange state of nervous prostration ensue, during which she had no other sensations than

those of a person during a hideous night-mare.

And as the chill morning dawned, the sight of that house, with its vast and deserted garden, seemed to her as if she was looking at a picture. She was beholding the back of the mansion, built of grey stone, and some scarlet creepers covered the lower part of it, and owing to the disposition of the soil, and the planting of the grounds, the rays of the morning sun had less to intercept them. To the rear of the mansion, and at both sides of it, vast rolling mists obscured the prospect, but the sun was reflected back from the hundred panes of the numerous windows, and its light fell with something of unearthly effect on the cypresses and yews profusely interspersed along the walks and terraces of that funereal garden. It was a most solemn sight to behold the joyous influence of the great orb of light become gradually dismal as it fell upon the sepulchral splendour of the old mansion of the Catesbys. The place seemed a fitting

abode for a race with such a guilt-stained pedigree.

But it was not of these things that Caroline Mildmaye was thinking, as broad daylight was cast upon that sublimely dismal scene. Her eye was glazing fast, her respiration was becoming difficult, and the pain of inflammation was spreading over her body. For nearly half of the time since she had fallen from the ladder, her mind was quite unconscious, and her physical strength had completely deserted her.

So she lay, unconscious of those who were approaching up the long terrace. She had not heard the garden-door open, or her senses of fear might have been wakened. Her mind was wandering, when she was roused into perception by a voice which made her vibrate. Yes! it was Mrs. Ullathorne's voice, talking to a woman who was accompanying her. That woman was telling Mrs. Ullathorne how at Dryford it was universally supposed that Miss Mildmaye had been drowned, and how they

were dragging the river on the night before, and how they were on that day to drag it again from Ashenbridge as far as Maldenford.

"They'll be clever if they drag Caroline Mildmaye out of it, Hawkins," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "Whatever became of her, and however she was spirited away, she did not drown herself."

"Crowder no doubt is at the bottom of her escape. It was she played you false."

"Ah! and if ever I catch Crowder—— Ha! what's that?"

And rushing forward, Mrs. Ullathorne, with her fearful face lightened up into an air of demoniac triumph, was in an instant stooping over the prostrate form of Caroline Mildmaye.

"Ha! ha! so I've found the runaway! 'Pon my word, Miss Mildmaye, you were very clever at your attempt to escape. But you see you have not succeeded. Come here, Hawkins, and lift her."

At that moment Caroline's senses returned to her in all their intensity. It

could scarcely be a dream? She felt that she was in their power. There was Mrs. Ullathorne, whose voice and presence had struck such dismay, and there was Hawkins — yes! Hawkins — the faithless servant of Eustace Mildmaye. Excitement roused Caroline into a transient effort of strength; she rose up from the ground to confront her enemy.

"Oh, Hawkins!" she ejaculated, addressing herself to Mrs. Ullathorne's detestable minion. But as the words left her tongue, and as she beheld the stern, sullen face of Hawkins, hard and bold, she sank down exhausted, and became unconscious of what was passing around.

"Quick — quick — run, Hawkins, for Lady Rockforest's garden-chair yonder, and we'll roll her into the house at once."

In a few minutes more Caroline Mildmaye, still senseless, was placed in an old Bath-chair, in which, in damp weather, Lady Rockforest was dragged about the garden. Mrs. Ullathorne went before with excited aspect, overjoyed at finding that

there was still the opportunity of her accomplishing her fell designs upon Caroline.

"That's it, Hawkins," she said; "drag her on; be quick, like a good creature." And then she ran back, and walked by the side of the Bath-chair, and helped Hawkins in pushing it along, and shortly they were in the house, and the chair was in the inner hall.

"Come, now, we'll take her up between us," said Mrs. Ullathorne, and they shifted the body of Caroline into a hall-chair, and prepared to ascend the stairs.

They were in the act of doing so, when they heard footsteps descending the stairs, and the form of Mrs. Ullathorne's son appeared in sight, with a chamber-candle in his hand. His face was ghastly pale and his dress disordered, and his speech was inarticulate. He was quite drunk, and reeled to and fro, while his unsuccessful attempts to speak betrayed how far gone were his senses.

"Ah! you drunken wretch," said his

mother, "'tis thus you have always ruined yourself by your drunken habits. Now would be the time for you to get Parson Sawyer to marry you, but I suppose he's as drunk as yourself."

"Who's there, I say?" cried he. "I'll fight the two of you for a bottle of wine. D'ye hear, I say; curses on you for a cow—ard."

And before he could finish his scarcely articulate address his foot had slipped, and the wretch tumbled down the whole flight of stairs, and came with his head crash against one of the large metal balustrades. The blood spouted from his nose, and he was stunned by the fall.

Caroline became faintly conscious of the scene. The noise of the falling man and the sound of angry voices were perceived by her clouded senses, and the sunlight streaming through the vast window on the stairs gave acute pain to her eyes.

"Stupid that you are!" said Mrs. Ullathorne, addressing her drunken son, "at the very moment that you are wanted

you are of no use. Come, Hawkins, lend a hand here."

And they set up the drunken man against the wall and left him there, while, taking Caroline Mildmaye to the chair, they again dragged her up the stairs. Happily for herself she was unconscious of what they were doing. The delirium of fever had set in, and she thought that she was in a boat upon the sea, rowed by her cousin Eustace Mildmaye, while a thunderstorm was crashing aloft in the sky, and the breakers of the ocean roared dreadfully around.

CHAPTER X.

Our readers will recollect that Sir Vaughan Gwynne and Henry Wilmot had arranged to see Mrs. St. Pierre at eleven o'clock on the morning after the day on which Louisa Mildmaye and Mrs. St. Pierre were going to visit Caroline and Eustace at Dryford. Punctually enough to the hour the two friends repaired to Portman-square.

"It is really," said Sir Vaughan, "a most awkward matter for you and I to stir in, my dear Wilmot. The fact that you paid your addresses to Louisa Mildmaye,

and that she accepted the hand of Lord Rockforest, makes it rather invidious for you to proceed actively against him, and it adds to the awkwardness that I should have proposed unsuccessfully for the other sister."

"I have felt that throughout," said Wilmot; "but I trust that Mrs. St. Pierre will make some allowance for us both. It was from the delicacy of my position that I had advised with you in the affair. But here we are." And he knocked at the door of Mr. St. Pierre.

"It is five minutes after eleven," said Sir Vaughan. "Mrs. St. Pierre is the soul of punctuality."

The door was then opened by a butler.

"Is Mrs. St. Pierre at home?" said Sir Vaughan Gwynne.

"No, sir," said the servant. "Mrs. St. Pierre went to Dryford two hours since. She left town at nine o'clock, sir."

"Gone!" said Sir Vaughan, with surprise; "I thought that she would have been here."

"I believe, sir, there is a letter for you, but I am not sure, sir. Will you please to walk into the breakfast-parlour?"

They then walked into the parlour, and both Sir Vaughan and Wilmot were rather astonished at the apparently cavalier treatment which Mrs. St. Pierre had offered them.

"Mrs. St. Pierre, sir," said the butler, returning, "went off this morning in a great hurry. She left this note to be given or sent to you."

Sir Vaughan took the note rather eagerly out of the man's hands, and read to Wilmot:

"DEAR SIR VAUGHAN,—I am compelled to break my appointment with you and Mr. Wilmot. I trust that you will excuse me. I shall let you know at what

time I shall be at home to-morrow to receive you. I am called unexpectedly out of town.

"Sincerely yours,

"MARY ST. PIERRE.

"Thursday Morning.

"P.S.—In case that what you want to speak about should be connected with the Belvyddyr tenantry and their opposition to the new railway, perhaps you might communicate with Mr. St. Pierre, as his health is now so improved."

Sir Vaughan observed that both the penmanship and wording of the note betrayed a carelessness and inaccuracy quite unusual in the notes of Mrs. St. Pierre.

"She was evidently in great haste," said Wilmot. "By Jove! my dear Gwynne, I think that we might open the matter up to Mr. St. Pierre. He is full of knowledge of past times and persons, and may help in this extraordinary business."

"Well, I don't know," said Sir Vaughan. "Poor Mr. St. Pierre is so very feeble in his health; though, to be sure, it has improved of late."

They discussed the question then, and after some consideration it was resolved that they should seek an interview with Mr. St. Pierre.

On the butler making his appearance in answer to a summons from the bell, and being told their wishes on the point, he said,

"Mr. St. Pierre, gentlemen, has Mr. Simson with him this morning from Lincoln's Inn. But I shall communicate your wishes, gentlemen."

"Stay," said Sir Vaughan, "and I'll scribble a note to Mr. St. Pierre." And he penned a few lines rapidly, soliciting an interview for himself and Mr. Wilmot, and gave it to the servant.

"Simson is his confidential solicitor,

and it's not unlucky that he should be here, if there were any difficulty——"

"It would be premature, though," said Wilmot, "to mention it to the attorney so soon." And they talked together.

"Will you, please, step this way, gentlemen?" said the butler, opening the door. And they proceeded up-stairs to Mr. St. Pierre's morning room.

On the way up they encountered Mr. Simson, who was coming out of Mr. St. Pierre's room. Mr. Simson was well known to Sir Vaughan, who said,

"How do you do, Mr. Simson? We have to apologise for disturbing you."

"Make no apologies, Sir Vaughan," said the attorney. "I shall be here all day, as I have some papers of Mr. St. Pierre's which must be read at once, and which can occupy me while you are visiting our respected friend."

And the man of business bowing defe-

rentially, passed down the stairs, and Wilmot, with Sir Vaughan Gwynne, was ushered into Mr. St. Pierre, who was rather surprised at receiving a visit from both, as his nervousness and ill-health had long excluded him from receiving morning visits without previous notice.

Some minutes were consumed in listening to Mr. St. Pierre's exact description of the state of his health, and his chronicle of what Dr. Chambers had last said to him; and then Sir Vaughan introduced the subject of their visit.

"Yes, Mr. St. Pierre, there is a matter in which Wilmot has something to say to you. It is rather a delicate subject—it is about Lord Rockforest."

"Ah! ah!" cried the invalid gentleman, getting fidgety, and thinking that it was about the police-court revelations that they wished to converse. His man of business, Mr. Simson, had previously been

telling him what people out of doors were saying of Lord Rockforest.

"Oh! it is very shocking. It is very dreadful, but perhaps it is a conspiracy to extort money. Oh dear! I'm sure I do not know what can be done. But can't you wait till Mrs. St. Pierre comes home, and we can discuss it with her?" And then the invalid feared that he had committed himself by saying so much.

"Why, my dear Mr. St. Pierre," said Henry Wilmot, "'tis about Lady Rockforest as much as about Lord Rockforest that I want to say a few words. You recollect about the old woman, Jenny Barnes, at the Belvyddyr workhouse?"

"What about her now? Is it the old woman that always said she had a secret, and was going to tell it, and then would not? Mr. Apreece, the curate, who attended her in her illness, always said that she had a troubled mind, though the sur-

geon seemed to think that she was not in her right senses. Is she dead? Ah! poor thing. We must all die."

"She is alive still, and it may become a question whether she is in her right senses or not. What I wanted to learn from you was, whether you recollect anything about the time that Lord Rockforest was born?"

Mr. St. Pierre looked surprised at the question. When in the full measure of his strength, his intellect had been prompt and vigorous, and even still a shrewd, keen expression was discernible in his eyes.

"Ah! my memory is not what it used to be. I knew the late Lord Rockforest; but for long before his death we were not intimate, owing to my having taken the side of his brother, poor Noel Catesby, in a difference that occurred between them. You see, they were not friends. They fell out about money matters, and were on opposite sides in politics. Ah dear me!

'twas sad to see how they did their best to injure each other."

"Indeed!" said Sir Vaughan—"to injure each other!" And the baronet and Wilmot exchanged significant glances.

"Yes, it is too true. I recollect when the present Lord Rockforest was born—I recollect it as well as if it were only yesterday. I remember how poor Noel Catesby took it to heart. It deprived him of his chance of the estates, and he was very coarse, and perhaps unjust, in all that he said about the mother of the present peer. Ah! I recollect Margaret Pendarves when she was a lovely woman, before she did foolish acts." And the old gentleman's tongue rambled into gossipping recollections of the times when he was young.

"But what did Noel Catesby ever say against her in particular?" asked Sir Vaughan, not liking to press the invalid too quickly.

"Oh! he said all sorts of things. He

said that he was convinced that the child did not belong to his brother. But that was all nonsense, you know."

"And did any person else ever entertain the same opinions?" asked Wilmot.

"Oh!" replied Mr. St. Pierre, "the world was always censorious upon poor Lady Rockforest. I took Noel Catesby's part, but I never went so far as to support his assertions in that respect."

"Mr. St. Pierre," said Henry Wilmot, "I have something most particular to communicate about the birth of Lord Rockforest."

"Dear me! What is it?—what is it?" cried Mr. St. Pierre, with nervous flurry. "I wish that Mrs. St. Pierre was here. Oh dear!"

"Nay, we thought," said Sir Vaughan, "that it would be better to tell it to you at once, after the disclosures made at the police-office yesterday."

"Well, well—what is it?"

"Why, sir," said Wilmot, "you are aware about the woman Barnes, and her having had a load on her mind. In my official duties I had shown her some little kindness, and, without knowing it, I had gained her confidence. I believe her to be in her senses, and she has made a solemn affidavit to the fact that she was a servant in the establishment of the late Lord Rockforest, where a woman of the name of Ullathorne resided, and that a child of the latter was substituted for the still-born son of Lady Rockforest. She swears positively that the child of Lady Rockforest was dead, and that a child of Mrs. Ullathorne's was, with the full connivance of Lady Rockforest, put forward as the legitimate offspring."

"Good Heavens! you do not mean this? Oh! you shock me. I wish Mrs. St. Pierre was here. This is a most delicate affair."

"It is so," said Sir Vaughan, "and

when you have heard further particulars, you will see that it will be necessary to take some decisive steps."

"Barnes is most positive and circumstantial in her statements," continued Wilmot. "She says that Lady Rockforest, about a month before her confinement, had been thrown from her pony-carriage, and that it was feared her child would not be born alive."

"Ah! I recollect the time well. I was in the park that day," said Mr. St. Pierre.

"She says that Lady Rockforest and Mrs. Ullathorne had gained her over, and that a surgeon, who was in attendance always on Lady Rockforest, was also in the secret. The surgeon's name was Colletts. It had been arranged that if Lady Rockforest had either a still-born child or a daughter, that another child would have been put in its place, and at that time Mrs. Ullathorne was near her confinement

too. It was the son of Mrs. Ullathorne who was put in the place of the dead infant of Lady Rockforest."

At another moment the flurried and nervous expression of Mr. St. Pierre's countenance would have been comical. He was quite bewildered with the statement of Henry Wilmot, and making allowance for his weakness, Sir Vaughan Gwynne interposed.

"It is, certainly, an extraordinary matter, Mr. St. Pierre, and really I would take the liberty of suggesting that you should require the advice of Mr. Simson. He is in the house now, and his opinion would be worth having."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. St. Pierre, eagerly catching at what would give him assistance. "Yes! Simson is very clever. Pray pull that bell." But scarcely had he given the order than Mr. St. Pierre quickly revoked it, and said,

"Stay, stay, Sir Vaughan, there is something that you do not know." And the old gentleman looked so confused and perplexed that both Sir Vaughan and Wilmot at first supposed that really some secret about Lord Rockforest's birth was in the possession of Mr. St. Pierre, and that he might, perchance, have desired to conceal it.

Mr. St. Pierre had got out of his chair, and fidgeted about the room. He looked out of the window, and then turning round, said, in a low voice,

"Something very extraordinary has occurred."

The tone in which these words were spoken, and the peculiar look by which they were accompanied, surprised Sir Vaughan Gwynne and Wilmot very much; and when they heard Mr. St. Pierre utter repeated wishes that Mrs. St. Pierre were present, their astonishment was increased.

But when he told them that Caroline Mildmaye was missing from her cousin's cottage, and that Mrs. St. Pierre had left town to discover her, their amazement was much increased. It was then, for the first time, that they heard of that fact. On the previous day, when they were going to visit Mrs. St. Pierre, for the purpose of communicating to her the case disclosed by Barnes, Mrs. St. Pierre herself did not know at all of the abduction of Caroline.

They were both greatly surprised, but the peculiar relation which each of them occupied towards the Mildmayes made them feel that their situation was delicate. Sir Vaughan, at first, was slightly hurt at Mrs. St. Pierre not having immediately sent for him to consult about it. But it appeared that Mr. St. Pierre had objected to that step, and that on the preceding evening he had desired the immediate presence of Mr. Simson, whose urgent

advice had been that the fact of Caroline Mildmaye having been taken away should be kept secret for at least one day, and that Mrs. St. Pierre should return to Dryford in the morning, when, if Caroline was not discovered, more active and public measures for her discovery might be adopted. Such had been the advice on which Mr. and Mrs. St. Pierre had acted on the previous night.

"Well, then, my dear Mr. St. Pierre," said Sir Vaughan, on learning this intelligence, "you cannot do better than take Mr. Simson again into your councils. Let us have your man of business here to consult with about this information that Wilmot has brought."

Mr. St. Pierre acquiesced, and Mr. Simson was summoned.

When the attorney was informed by Mr. St. Pierre of the reason why he had been sent for, his professional coolness to some

extent prevented him from exhibiting as much surprise as would have been shown by others. Mr. Simson at once said,

"This is a most grave matter to stir in, and I would strongly advise Mr. Wilmot to be very cautious what he says or does in the business. The woman may be a half maniac or a confirmed liar——"

"Well," said Wilmot, interrupting, "both the clergyman of the workhouse, Mr. Apreece, and Doctor Onwhyn, and myself think that the woman is not mad. She never made this statement before, but she always said that there was a thing on her mind which might affect other persons. And from what Mr. St. Pierre has just said about Noel Catesby's thinking that there was fraud in the case, I am inclined to believe that the case demands close attention."

"Lord Rockforest, certainly," said Mr. Simson, "has always been a wild bird,

and low, queer people have always been about him. He is a curious subject for so strange a story. What was the name of the surgeon that she stated to have been in attendance at the time?"

"His name was Colletts, and he was a party to the fraud."

"Colletts! Colletts! Dear me! Well, it is really a most singular thing, but I have heard, amongst the other scandals associated with Lord Rockforest's name, that an Old Bailey attorney of that identical name was known to have teazed Lord Rockforest about 'hush-money.' I have heard it stated that this Colletts has asserted that he had some secrets about Lord Rockforest which could torture him. And, by Jove! now that I recollect myself, I am almost sure that I have heard that this attorney Colletts was the son or nephew of a doctor or apothecary of the name of Colletts. Some acts of this attorney have

unfortunately made his name and antecedents notorious in the profession."

"Well, the coincidence," said Sir Vaughan, "is not only striking, but almost confirmatory. You see that the matter is very serious."

"And the more serious it is, the more necessary for acting cautiously," said the solicitor.

"Oh! cautiously, cautiously," said Mr. St. Pierre, with the timidity of an invalid; "by all means, I pray of you go cautiously, my good friends."

It was then agreed that until Mrs. St. Pierre returned, or until news of a decisive kind arrived from Dryford, that nothing should be done. It was with much impatience and reluctance that Sir Vaughan Gwynne acceded to this dilatory policy, although it would have been difficult for him to have stated what else could have been done under the circumstances. Wil-

mot and the baronet left the house together, and talked eagerly about the extraordinary news which Mr. St. Pierre had communicated to them, and from their previous position with the Mildmaye girls they were intensely interested about it.

"I shall be anxious until Mrs. St. Pierre comes home," said Sir Vaughan. "I am half offended with her for not having communicated with me."

"Nay, nay," remarked Wilmot; "you are unjust to her; you forget what you said a while ago about the delicate relation in which you stood with Miss Mildmaye."

"Well, I suppose Mrs. St. Pierre was right," said Sir Vaughan; "but it is certainly a most extraordinary case that a lady like Miss Caroline Mildmaye should be taken away. I doubt whether Lady Rockforest could have been the person who did it. But we shall know all about it this evening, as Mr. Simson said."

And the two friends walked on together to their club, and discussed the case of Lord Rockforest, and the new disgrace he had incurred; and Sir Vaughan condoled with Wilmot on the fact of Louisa Mildmaye having fallen to such a person. But if they could have got a glimpse of what Lord Rockforest was then thinking of, and if they could have seen whither he was going, neither Sir Vaughan nor Henry Wilmot would have acquiesced in the advice to remain quiet for all that day until Mrs. St. Pierre should return in the evening.

For at that very moment, when they were both sauntering away from Portman-square, Lord Rockforest was two or three miles on the other side of the village of Eltham, in Kent, and some seven or eight miles from town. He was stamping up and down the road in a great rage. The

horses had taken head coming down a steep hill; the postilion had fallen, and been much bruised; a wheel of the carriage had been smashed, and the pole partly splintered, and his lordship's journey to Catesby Court had for the moment been most unexpectedly interrupted.

"This is too bad!" cried Lord Rockforest, angrily; "that confounded fellow should have minded the turn in the hill." And he chafed violently, as he walked to and fro. "So, here is the messenger from Eltham. But I see no sign of a post-chaise." And a servant came running up out of breath. "Well, have you been able to hire a chaise at the Greyhound, Biggs?"

"No, my lord; their chaise is out for the day at a wedding-party—neither is there one at the other inn."

"Confound themselves, their chaises, and their weddings!"

"There is no carriage to be had, they say, nearer than Blackheath."

"D——n! This is too bad," said Lord Rockforest.

"I told a smith to come out to see whether he could do anything to set the carriage together. Here he is, coming with his tools, my lord."

"I'm afraid, Biggs, it's too confounded a job for any smith to settle."

The smith, however, was by no means of that opinion, and undertook, if his lordship "would not mind the look of the thing," to put the vehicle into repair, so as to be able to travel for twenty miles further.

"And what time will it take to do it?" cried Lord Rockforest.

"A couple of hours will do it," said the smith.

"Well, then, go to work at once; and, Biggs, do you follow with it. I shall walk

on before. I shall wait at Suffield Hill in case you do not come up; and lose no time in coming after me as fast as you can."

And Lord Rockforest, excited and burning with impatience, walked on the road which led to that part of Kent where Catesby Court was situate. His mind was in great excitement, and he talked at times rapidly to himself, quite unconscious that he was observed by several of the persons whom he met.

"That it should ever have come to this! Was ever man before in such a way? I never could have calculated that things would so turn out. And to think, after all, that Ullathorne's story should be true —a thing which I always believed only a lie to extort money from me! That I should be her son, and that fellow, John Ullathorne, to be my brother! It's enough to drive me mad; at the very

time, too, when those rascally newspapers will be placarding me all through the country."

On and on he walked, with distracted aspect and contorted countenance.

"What am I doing? Whither am I going? By George! I feel half-crazed. But Colletts also has come out against me. How strange that the fellow should have come with his father's account of the transaction, and that he should have been with me last night, just before Sawyer arrived with the news that John Ullathorne had taken off Caroline Mildmaye, with the intention of marrying her! How truly unfortunate I was in not having been able to get her to accept me at Belvyddyr! If I had married her then, all might have gone right with me, and I should have the influence of the St. Pierre family to defend me and help me out of this scrape, and possibly I might have got

some of old St. Pierre's money, as he has no children. Ah! Rockforest, you have been a great enemy to yourself. You ought to curse your stars. Yes! so I ought—so I ought. I suppose that I must have been born with this wild devilry in me. Yes! I suppose that I am Mother Ullathorne's child."

And, stopping for a moment, Lord Rockforest drew a brandy-flask from his side-pocket, and drank copiously from it. He then strode onward again more rapidly than before, and continued to debate his case with himself.

"I know not what I shall do. I am trusting again too much to impulse, as I have always done through life. Yet, if I were in time at Catesby Court to prevent any serious consequences to Caroline Mildmaye, and if I rescued her from the clutches of that devil, John Ullathorne, possibly I might be able to make the St.

Pierres overlook the facts disclosed against me yesterday. But there's no knowing what John Ullathorne may have done since. Sawyer disclosed to me last night that John Ullathorne had taken her off for the express purpose of a forced marriage—a regular abduction affair. John Ullathorne, forsooth, was to have one sister, as well as I was to get another! But Sawyer said that he would not lend himself to his designs. Yet who would mind such a fellow as Sawyer's word? I could get him to swear black was white for fifty pounds. Perhaps he has married them by this time. D—n it! how unfortunate it was that the carriage should break down!"

He had by this time gained the top of an eminence, which commanded an extensive view of the road over which he had passed. He eagerly looked back, though he well knew that it would be

quite impossible for the carriage to have been set up since he had left it. Again he took a dram from the flask, and pushed on.

"As for Louisa Mildmaye, I do not suppose that she ever would look at me again, after the revelations of yesterday. I was a fool, after all, for the sake of five hundred pounds, to have allowed those infernal women to blacken me at such a rate. But, by Jove! my purse could not stand it any longer, and they had got enough out of me. Was there ever a poor devil in such a mess as I am? I am threatened with the loss of my estate and title, by the simultaneous attack of the attorney Colletts, and of John Ullathorne's vindictive jealousy of my superiority to him. Then I am hounded in the police-courts, and pilloried in the newspapers, and I shall be the talk of London this day, and for all the week. If I lose

Louisa Mildmaye as a wife, my last shred of 'respectability' (that tyrant of English life) will be gone for ever. If I could get her to marry me, I might face the world yet, and brazen it out; but I fear that she never would have me."

And, dragging at the brandy-flask again, he was going to take another dram of it.

"Curse upon it, the flask is empty!" And with violence he flung it from him, and dashed it into pieces against the stone piers of a gateway. On and on he walked, in a state of prodigious excitement, under the combined influence of drink and mental passion. At times his pace bordered upon running. Sometimes he would instinctively calm himself for a minute or two, whenever he saw any one approaching. Even then the terrible aspect of his face would rivet the attention of the casual passenger, who would look after so striking a figure walking rapidly along;

and then, when out of hearing, Lord Rockforest would again remain talking to himself.

Ah! if at that critical moment, while that unhappy man was stalking along on the way to Catesby Court—if Sir Vaughan Gwynne or Henry Wilmot could then have got sight of him—if they could have heard what he was saying to himself—if they had known whither he was going, and for what purpose—would they have been sauntering along so quietly through Orchard-street out of Portman-square after their discussion at Mr. St. Pierre's?

But thus it is in the affairs of the world. If the general of one army could get a glimpse into the tent of the adverse commander—or if, in the affairs of the heart, one lover could see through the designs of a rival for the affections of a fair mistress, —old plans would be given up, and new ones formed at once. So Sir Vaughan

and Henry Wilmot continued to walk slowly down Orchard-street, entirely ignorant of where Lord Rockforest was, though his title to his estate, and the truth of the tale as told by Jenny Barnes, was the subject of their thoughts.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE Lord Rockforest was travelling on to Catesby Court, and while Sir Vaughan Gwynne and Henry Wilmot were discussing at Mr. St. Pierre's, in Portman-square, Caroline Mildmaye was in bed at Catesby Court, in a state partaking at once of fever and utter prostration. Happily for herself, at times there were intervals of unconsciousness, and sleep for a few minutes would visit her eyelids, only, however, to leave her to wake up again to a delirious perception of her position.

The shock of such violent and alarming sensations coming upon her with so much pressure in so short a period, was quite enough to overcome her. She was lying for the second time on that Thursday morning in a room at Catesby Court. On the foregoing Tuesday afternoon she had been at Dryford, after having received the visit from Mrs. St. Pierre and Louisa. On that night she had been taken away, and was in durance at Catesby Court on the next day (Wednesday), with her mind exhausted, and her reason all but prostrated at the turn of her situation. On the previous night she had fruitlessly endeavoured to make her escape, and the reader will recollect that it was only on the day after her abduction that Mrs. St. Pierre and Louisa had received the alarming news. Now, again, at Thursday noon, in a state more nearly dead than alive, she was lying helpless on a bed, and listening

at intervals to altercations between Lady Rockforest and Mrs. Ullathorne.

Undoubtedly, if Caroline Mildmaye's nervous energy had not been previously much exhausted by her long and anxious attendance on Eustace, and also by the pain she had felt on seeing him stricken down by a paralytic stroke, as well as by the knowledge that some mysterious secret in connexion with Lord Rockforest was pressing heavily on her cousin's mind, we say, undoubtedly in that case, Caroline Mildmaye would not have so completely succumbed under the circumstances of her alarming abduction. Yet, taken altogether, there were particular circumstances attendant upon her sudden capture and rapid transference to Catesby Court which would have been sufficient of themselves to have crushed most women.

In the mean time, while Caroline was lying exhausted, and while Lady Rock-

forest was gloating with the idea that the daughter of her ancient enemy was in her power, Lord Rockforest was speeding on his way (after an interruption of nearly three hours) towards Catesby Court; and when he arrived at the banks of the M——, he was much astonished at finding that boatmen were dragging it for the body of Miss Caroline Mildmaye, and he learned that her sister had just gone in the direction of the boats. He resolved (as the reader knows already) to follow Louisa. Just about the same time the woman Hawkins, who had drugged Caroline Mildmaye on the eventful evening of her forcible abduction, might have been seen returning down the long and open hill that rose in front of Catesby Court. She was coming from the banks of the M—— river, and, at the desire of Mrs. Ullathorne, she had gone to see whether the boats were dragging the river for the lost body of Caroline Mildmaye.

And after some conversation with Hawkins, Mrs. Ullathorne resolved to visit the scene herself, and investigate the singular circumstance of a female having been drowned, and some articles of Miss Mildmaye's being found, as if they had belonged to the corpse.

"It is a strange thing, and yet a lucky thing, too, for us. It will keep them off the right scent for a little longer. Ah! John Ullathorne, your cursed drunkenness will be your final ruin. The bird is in your hand, and yet you cannot keep it. There he is lying on yonder sofa as senseless as a pig."

And deep stertorous breathing on the sofa of the room indicated where her son was sleeping off his debauch.

"He will not," she continued, "be himself again for some hours. I shall drive up to the river-side and see with my own eyes what they are about."

She was soon seated in an old gig, and drove up in the direction of Mr. Denham's place at Topcliffe Cottage. When she arrived at the top of the hill, the brakes and cliffs near the banks of the river prevented her getting closer to the banks, and calling to a woman who was collecting firewood, and who was the wife of one of the few woodrangers, to hold her old mare, Mrs. Ullathorne strode forward through the shrubbery to catch a view of the boats while dragging the river.

She had not been there many minutes, when, higher up the walk, she caught sight of a female form. Just then she heard a cry by the river-side, not far to the right, and she beheld the body of a woman taken out of the water, while the men in the boats stooped over it. She was unable, of course, to perceive who or what was the person thus raised out of the river. She saw her removed up the bank and placed

on men's shoulders, and she was much excited and interested in the operation. Then when she turned, thinking to see the woman that was advancing from the left, on account of the winding walk Mrs. Ullathorne could not perceive who was coming in her direction.

But in a few minutes the rapid footsteps of one in eager haste were heard by her, and before she could recover from the sudden surprise, Louisa Mildmaye fell panting before her feet, and in another moment Lord Rockforest (as stated previously) was before her, in hot pursuit of Louisa.

For a moment the unexpected meeting equally startled both of them. Neither of them could speak. Each seemed equally surprised at being so suddenly confronted by the other. Their faces betrayed the emotions of astonishment by which both of

them were animated. Mrs. Ullathorne was the first to speak.

"You here!" she cried. "Why, where on earth have you come from?"

"I came from London," said Lord Rockforest. "I got private hints before I left about what you were thinking of down at the Court."

"Ay! and it will be done to-day," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "Jack is below, and this one's sister is there."

And as she said these words she stooped down over the prostrate body of Louisa Mildmaye, and lifted her up. Louisa was quite senseless, and unconscious of whose presence she was in.

"There is no time to be lost," continued Mrs. Ullathorne; "you cannot suppose that they will allow a young lady to be long missing without hunting the country up and down for her. Come, let us drive

at once to the Court, and have matters all settled. You can marry either one or the other of them, I suppose."

"Is young Mildmaye alive still?" said Lord Rockforest. "If he were out of the way, and that he had not blabbed what he had been told, all might be well yet."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Ullathorne, "if from the first you had been guided by me, he would have been done for long ago. The thing could easily have been managed by Jack Ullathorne, or I could have done it myself, and nobody been a bit the wiser." And her evil countenance grew dark as she spoke.

"Come, no more of that," said the peer; "we have both of us been bad enough without going so far as that."

"Pshaw! you're a lily-livered fellow after all," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "You have made a nice business of it now; all the papers in the country will be attacking

you. Well, you have one chance yet, if your nerve does not fail you—marry one of those girls. The sister of this one is safe down under lock and key at the Court, and even if the parson blabbed, the family will not peach upon you, and you will keep the title and the estate, and Jack and I can get our annuities from you as ever. If you do not, we're all smashed, and don't be too sure but that Jack Ullathorne will be as good as his word, and——"

She paused—said nothing, but the expression of Lord Rockforest's face showed that he comprehended her meaning.

"It's my last and only chance," said he. "I'll venture all, and I'll dare all."

He immediately took up Louisa in his arms, and lifted her into the gig, and along with Mrs. Ullathorne set out for the Court.

"She's coming to herself," said he, look-

ing at Louisa, who gave signs of returning consciousness. And he lashed the horse to go faster.

When Louisa Mildmaye awoke to consciousness, and saw in whose hands she was, she screamed with dismay.

"Lord Rockforest, you must not—you dare not harm me." And with strong feminine spirit she made a desperate effort to leap out of the vehicle, but Mrs. Ullathorne held her down, and kept her firm.

"Louisa, dearest, do not be afraid. I am your own Rockforest. Yes! my sweet love, we shall be happy to-day. Instead of a stale, stupid wedding at St. George's, Hanover-square, we shall be married comfortably together in my family seat. Here we are just at it, my girl, and the walls of Catesby Court never opened on a lovelier bride. Ah! Sawyer, there you are. The parson is ready for us, my dear."

And in another moment they were

drawn up before the long flight of steps which led to the front door of Catesby Court. The first sight of that vast and gloomy place even added to the terror of Louisa Mildmaye, as she beheld the lonely lawn, the dreary mansion, looking chill, funereal, and deserted, and the dismally dark woods with which it was surrounded. "Help! help!" she vainly cried, as she idly, though fiercely, struggled with Lord Rockforest, who mocked her attempts to escape. The recollection of the odious revelations in the police-office of his vile associations, his reckless orgies with the most depraved companions, and the imputations on his character, made her feel as if she was in the clutch of a wild beast, while Lord Rockforest held her in his arms, and by main strength, though not without some difficulty, succeeded in rapidly taking her up the steps.

"Come, Sawyer, be quick; get every-

thing ready; we must have the ceremony performed at once—not the least delay."

"Oh! Mr. Sawyer," cried Louisa Mildmaye, "you will not, as a man, stand by and see a woman outraged by a coward." And the eyes of Louisa flashed with fire, while with still something of defiant pride and womanly spirit she confronted the man whom she then loathed with unutterable hatred, as he stood before her with the mask stripped from his character.

"Sawyer is here, my dear," said Lord Rockforest, "to make us the happiest couple in the world. Come, what room shall we be married in?"

"In the old chapel above stairs," said Sawyer; "that would be the most suitable spot."

"Ay, so it would. Come, Louisa, you must not be so coy with your bridegroom." And Lord Rockforest took her up again in his arms and carried her up-stairs.

They had scarcely arrived at the upper landing-place when they were encountered by John Ullathorne. At a glance, Louisa, amidst all her fright, recognised the remarkable face of the stranger, whom she had seen more than once before, and of whom she had heard Caroline speak. There was no mistaking that livid face, that snake-like eye, that scowling, sinister visage.

"Oh, mercy! mercy! Help! help!" cried Louisa, as she saw Ullathorne, who was only half-awake from his sottish orgies of the previous night.

"John Ullathorne, you shall be one of the witnesses to the wedding. Come, Sawyer," cried Lord Rockforest, "here we are." And so saying, his lordship kicked before him the large door of an apartment which entered into a room fitted up as a chapel for the religious service of the Church of Rome. It had been so prepared

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

"[redacted]" said Mrs. Malthorne, "[redacted]"

"Dine with us—dine with us," said Lord Rackbrook. "Come, come—we are losing time. What frowning you have with that brow, Annesley."

But Mrs. Malthorne was too late. In came the unhappy peeress, looking fiercely

excited. No sooner had she caught sight of Louisa Mildmaye, trembling and terror-stricken, than she gave an hysterical shriek of malignant delight.

"Ha! this is glorious. So the other of them is delivered into my hands. We shall have the two weddings at once. Come, Ullathorne, what are you idly loitering about? Go and fetch your bride. She is in the blue bedroom at the other side of the corridor."

"No, no!" cried Mrs. Ullathorne; "let the young lady have liberty of choice. Miss Louisa is going to marry Lord Rockforest, and (she said in a whisper) that will be enough. Calm yourself—calm yourself."

But the peeress was not so to be calmed. The sight of Louisa Mildmaye only increased her frenzy, and desiring John Ullathorne to follow her, she rushed from the room.

"Come, come, we can have no scenes with the old hag," said Lord Rockforest; "shut her out—shut her out." And Mrs. Ullathorne was striding to the door to accomplish the peer's orders, when John Ullathorne, rousing himself with an effort out of the effects of his sottish debauch of the previous night, cried out,

"No, ah—no, ah—I say things shan't be so. Her ladyship promised that I should marry Miss Caroline Mildmaye, if I liked, and I shall have it so. I have just as good a right to her as you, yourself, to her sister there."

"Fool—dolt—idiot that you are—stand out of my way," cried Mrs. Ullathorne, as she advanced to her son, and seized him roughly by the shoulder, intending to turn him from the door of the chapel. But he fiercely spurned her aside, and told her to desist, adding, in the coarsest language, that he should do as he pleased;

and he even intimated that, if he chose, the marriage between Lord Rockforest and Louisa should be stopped.

Scarcely had he spoken these words, than Lord Rockforest, catching at their import, and losing all mastery over himself, rushed at him, and dealt him an overwhelming blow. Stupified partly from his debauch, Ullathorne reeled and fell heavily to the ground, under the peer's practised power of gladiatorial assault. The blood burst from his nose and mouth.

Terrified with this exhibition of furious violence, Louisa Mildmaye threw herself on the compassion of Sawyer. She was acquainted with his personal appearance, as that of a degraded outcast from the clergy, but she hoped to find that he was not an utter outcast from humanity, and while Mrs. Ullathorne was upbraiding Lord Rockforest for his frantic violence, and helping to staunch the blood of the

wounded man, who was completely stunned by the blow, Louisa cried,

"Oh! for God's sake, Mr. Sawyer, you who knew my family—you, the son of a gentleman—will not stand by and see me outraged and insulted. I tell you," cried Louisa, desperately excited, "that you will bring down the wrath of the Most High and Mighty God—his avenging arm will yet smite you for the crime of deserting an outraged woman, if you become the accomplice——"

But the words died away in her throat as she beheld the door of the chapel open, and what seemed a vision from the other world appeared by the side of Lady Rockforest.

Great Heavens! Who—what was that before her? Was that Caroline Mildmaye, her own sister, or was it her ghost? The wasted and sunken cheek—the look of terror in the face and torture on the

brow—the blasted aspect of that misery-stricken visage—its mute horror—were startling and appalling to behold. The figure did not appear to see. Its vision was imperfect. No! that was not—it could not be Caroline Mildmaye.

Ha! it was! it is she! That hysteric shriek told that it was her Caroline. In an instant Louisa was clasping her with an agony of sisterly emotion to her breast. "Caroline! Caroline!" was all that she could murmur, while her heart throbbed violently.

Caroline herself sank senseless into Louisa's arms, as if her mind was bewildered, while scalding tears poured from Louisa's eyes as she beheld the dreadful change which, in so short a time, had come over her beloved sister's appearance. There was a strange something in her face that puzzled Louisa at first in her rapid glance. Ha! what was that? What were

those white spots—like frost—all along her hair.

"Good God! Her hair is grey!" cried Louisa.

And so it was. In the agony of her protracted terror Caroline Mildmaye had added another to the well-authenticated instances of persons like Marie Antoinette, whose hair, under the pressure of intense anxiety and horrible apprehensions, had turned grey in a few hours.

But while Louisa was clasping her sister to her bosom, Lady Rockforest was feasting her eyes with delight at the sight of the two sisters in her power. "Ah, now!" she cried, "I am indeed revenged upon the execrable Mary St. Pierre. Now I have her daughters in my house, and they shall be married as I please, and to whom I please. I shall make their mother's bones creak in their coffin—as I give her daughters away in this old chapel to——"

And the peeress was gloating with fiendish joy over the mental misery and torture of the daughters of one whose memory she abhorred, when she caught sight of the bleeding figure of John Ullathorne, who had been propped up against one of the seats in the old chapel, while his mother was stanching the blood that flowed from him.

"What is this?" she cried. "Who has done this——"

But she was cut short by Lord Rockforest, who pushed her aside, and, catching hold of Louisa Mildmaye, said,

"Come—come! there must be no delay, or I shall waive ceremony altogether." And tearing Louisa away from her sister, he caught her up in his arms as easily as if she had been an infant, and carried her up towards the end of the chapel.

"Come, Sawyer, to work; shuffle through without delay!" cried the peer

to the degraded clergyman. "Hang it, man, what ails you?" he cried, as he saw that the wretched Sawyer was faltering at his work.

"Stop—stop, I conjure you," said the faint voice of Caroline, tottering forward. "I charge you, in the name of God, to stop—this can be no marriage. Louisa, Mr. Sawyer, that person is not Lord Rockforest; he is——" And she gasped with weakness, unable to pronounce any more.

"Never mind—never mind!" cried Lord Rockforest, stamping on the ground with rage, addressing himself to Sawyer.

"What's that?" cried the latter, as if he heard some noise outside. And he ran hastily to the windows, and his cheeks paled as he looked out. He turned with looks of apprehension to Lord Rockforest. The latter rushed hastily to the window. Horrible was the scowl and odious the

imprecation of the peer, as a glance told him that his prey would escape his clutch. But, maddened with vice and passion, he turned rapidly round, and crying, "Curses —curses upon you all!" he rushed fiercely towards Caroline Mildmaye, and snatching her up aloft in his arms, dragged her off wildly out of the room, and rushed along the corridor outside.

CHAPTER XII.

CAROLINE had not perceived that there was any chance of help at hand. She screamed aloud again and again, and her piercing shrieks resounded along the corridors of the old mansion. The moment of unspeakable horror which she had all along looked forward to with such dreadful apprehension had arrived, and she experienced thoughts of agony, while her infuriated assailant strode along with her towards a remote chamber at the extremity of the right wing of the house. He kicked the door before him as he

entered it, and flung his terror-stricken burden from him on a sofa, while he turned to shut and bolt the door. But, as he was doing so, it was dashed back in his face, and a man attempted to enter. Powerful, fierce, and excited to frenzy, with the fury of a maniac Lord Rockforest hurled himself against the door, and had nearly succeeded in shutting it, but a man's arm interposed between the door-post, and the peer with all his strength pressed against the door, severely galling the arm that was raised between Caroline Mildmaye and immediate ruin. Stalwart was that arm, and vigorous was the power which resisted the efforts of Lord Rockforest, but by degrees the person outside forced his way through, and Sir Vaughan Gwynne's figure appeared in sight.

For it was little more than three hours previously, when, just as Sir Vaughan and Wilmot had turned out of Orchard-street

into Oxford-street, they were accosted by a woman whom neither of them knew. It was Crowder, who, finding on the previous night that Caroline had not been able to make her escape, and dreading the consequences of having assisted her even so far, had fled from Catesby Court, and resolved to give information. She did not do so, even at the last moment, without considerable reluctance; and not knowing any of the authorities at Dryford, she thought that her merits would be enhanced, and the recollection of her previous complicity as a spy of Lady Rockforest's forgotten, if she went straight to Mrs. St. Pierre's and divulged the facts. Then she wavered about it, recollecting that she had been previously dismissed from Mrs. St. Pierre's; but after making up her mind to go to Portman-square, she met Sir Vaughan and Henry Wilmot just after they had turned into Oxford-street. She was well ac-

quainted with their appearance, having often seen them at Belvyddyr; and as she had, in point of fact, been an eavesdropper on some of their conversation, she instantly went up to them, and told them the whole circumstances. They lost no time in availing themselves of her revelations. They started at once for Catesby Court, and, owing to the accident that had happened to Lord Rockforest's carriage, they had arrived just at the moment we have described.

The baronet by main strength squeezed himself in, and, as he struggled into the apartment, he said,

"Now, Mr. Ullathorne, you must answer for your outrageous and criminal proceedings."

"*That* for your interference!" cried Lord Rockforest, striking heavily at the head of Sir Vaughan; but the latter parried the attack with his arm, which, though

grievously injured by the struggle to get in, broke the force of the peer's blow, which fell upon the upper part of the baronet's chest. In the next moment they had grappled with each other. The peer was the larger and more muscular man of the two; but what Sir Vaughan wanted in weight was made up for in sinewy strength of limb and wiry tenacity. They wrestled with each other with terrible earnestness, and at the first encounter Lord Rockforest had nearly swung his antagonist to the ground, but just as Sir Vaughan was on the floor he recovered his legs with singular agility, never letting go hold of his athletic assailant, or faltering in his grasp.

"How dare you intrude here?" roared Lord Rockforest, while his face was swollen with rage; and then clutching his courageous antagonist, he drove him up against the wall of the room.

"To chastise a coward, and to bring a criminal to justice!" was the answer of Sir Vaughan Gwynne, still griping his adversary. The latter, more enraged than ever at the reply, tore his antagonist away from the wall, and again endeavoured to knock him down, dragging him out into the middle of the floor.

The room was large, and as both struggled for the fall, the contest between them was fiercely desperate. If the peer succeeded in flinging Sir Vaughan, it was evident that the latter had nothing to expect from his mercy. The baronet, however, held on his clutch with steadfast resolve, although his right arm was sorely weakened by the pressure against the door, but his efforts to throw the peer were fruitless, and Lord Rockforest was equally foiled. But gnashing his teeth, and with a horrid scowl on his face, Lord Rockforest, making a violent effort, tore himself

away from Sir Vaughan, and plunging his right hand into the left side of his coat, dragged out a pistol, and, cocking it, cried,

"Receive this for your audacious interference with me."

Springing rapidly aside, and with a movement of singular dexterity, Sir Vaughan knocked the pistol up in the air, which exploded harmlessly, while, at the same time, with all his force he struck at Lord Rockforest, who reeled under the blow. But recovering himself afresh, with tiger-like ferocity Lord Rockforest again grappled with his undaunted foe, and both their powerful frames and athletic forms were twined together, while with masculine hardihood on either side they struggled for the fall. For two or three minutes they swung each other round and round, but Sir Vaughan, resorting to stratagem against the superior muscle of the

huge and gladiatorial form opposed to him, had recourse to a peculiar trick in wrestling, which in early days he had learned in Lancashire, and pretending to loose his hold, while his antagonist separated his legs, the baronet suddenly tripped him with his right foot, and at the same time dealt him a tremendous blow with his left hand; Lord Rockforest fell heavily with Sir Vaughan upon him, and came with all his force against the corner of a large steel fender, against which his skull struck with fearful severity, leaving him stunned for the moment.

Looking only for a moment at his fallen adversary, convulsively panting on the floor, Sir Vaughan turned swiftly round, and with eager anxiety raised Caroline, who was still in a senseless state. He took her up gently and bore her from the chamber, whose door he locked, so as to prevent the egress of Lord Rockforest.

"Wilmot! Wilmot!" he cried, loudly, as he hastened back along the corridor with his hapless charge upon his breast; and he had not advanced far before he met Wilmot and Louisa Mildmaye coming hurriedly towards him.

"Bring her in here—bring her here," cried Louisa, rushing rapidly up to her beloved and senseless sister, whom they took into a large chamber, and placed lengthwise on a couch. As they did so, Caroline breathed again, and opening her eyes, when she saw Louisa, she eagerly extended her hands towards her, as she relapsed again into an hysterical fit.

"Water, water, Wilmot," cried Sir Vaughan, while Wilmot ran to look for some. Just as he was issuing from the door he was on the point of throwing down Lady Rockforest, who had slowly crawled along after them. Running into an opposite chamber, and obtaining what he wanted, he was soon by Louisa's side

ministering to the wants of the poor feeble invalid, who lay like a corpse upon the sofa. Neither Sir Vaughan nor Louisa had apparently noticed Lady Rockforest's presence. The latter was coughing violently, and had not yet approached as far as the group in the middle of the apartment; but Wilmot could not help being struck with the convulsive movement of the aged peeress's right hand as if she was grasping at something inside her robe.

"And so you have escaped me, have you, Caroline Mildmaye," said the wretched woman. "Ha! ha! your mother didn't, though—I killed her—ha! ha! Yes! yes! when she was near her confinement I met her at Brighton in the library, and how she cowered before my withering words. Ugh! ugh! this vile cough—how it teases me!" And the old peeress paused for a minute, while her person was agitated by the violence of her coughing.

Caroline roused up from her fainting

for a moment, but when she saw the face of Lady Rockforest near her, she gave a faint shriek, her limbs became contorted, and she fell back again in a fit of weakness.

While Louisa hung over her, and was sprinkling her face with water, Lady Rockforest stealthily approached. Sir Vaughan Gwynne's face was averted at the time, and was steadfastly regarding the fast paling countenance of Caroline. Drawing a poniard from her breast, Lady Rockforest leant forward, poised it aloft, and aimed with it a deadly blow at the breast of Louisa Mildmaye; but the rustling of her dress, and the gleaming radiance of the glittering dagger, attracted the notice of Wilmot, who, instantaneously turning round, most fortunately averted the blow, though at his own most severe expense, for the dagger went a couple of inches into his arm, and glanced aside from the

bone, while a torrent of blood spurted from the wound, and covered the dress and person of Wilmot with its scarlet stream. Balked of her revenge, and apparently overcome with her effort, Lady Rockforest fell forward on her face and hands, prostrate and utterly exhausted in her last fruitless attempt to wreak her vindictiveness on the daughters of one whom she regarded as her ancient foe.

"It is nothing—I am not hurt," said Wilmot, with a smile, as Louisa beheld the blood bursting in torrents from his wound, which was more severe than Wilmot would acknowledge. "Attend to your sister, I beg." And Wilmot stooped to raise the fallen peeress, who was in convulsions at the time. Regardless of her malign character, he hastened to bear the body to one of the sofas in the apartment. The face of Lady Rockforest was ashy in its hue, and she looked at the time more

like a quivering corpse than a human being.

While Wilmot was thus occupied, an explosion, as if from a pistol, was heard not far off, and startled by the noise, the eyes of Sir Vaughan Gwynne and Wilmot met each other.

"What! where can that be?" asked Wilmot.

"I know," cried Sir Vaughan; and rushing out from the room, he ran back to the chamber where he had locked in the bold antagonist with whom he had had so desperate an encounter; and he listened attentively outside. Not a sound of any kind met his ear. Opening with caution the door, he advanced into the room, and beheld lying on the floor the corpse of his late adversary, the eldest son of Lady Rockforest's dreary and congenial associate. For years he had been successfully palmed upon the world as the

heir of the house of Catesby, which had become legally extinct on the death of the last peer. The imposture had been the chief crime which had racked the breast of the unfortunate peeress, and she had confided it to the young and sensitive clergyman in a moment of agony, when she had thought herself at the point of death.

The titular Lord Rockforest was stone dead. He had shot himself through the brain. Sir Vaughan Gwynne turned his body round, and raised it in a chair; but all sign of life had vanished. While Sir Vaughan was in the act of attending to the corpse, the noise of several footsteps was heard, and the room was soon entered by a party of several persons, who had hastened from Mr. Denham's shooting cottage. Amongst them was Doctor Goer, who had arrived at the cottage not long after Louisa had been missed by Miss Goer. They had some slight information

from an old woman who had been gathering firewood, and who had witnessed Louisa being placed in the open chaise with Mrs. Ullathorne.

"He is quite dead," said Doctor Goer. "Medical skill can avail him nought. You had better, men, place the body on the bed, and let no one touch it, and let the room be locked and guarded. The coroner must be sent for without an instant's delay. I can be of more use elsewhere."

And Doctor Goer at once hastened back to the room where Caroline Mildmaye was attended by her sister and Miss Goer. They had placed her on a bed, and were composing her agitation as well as they could. The sight of her dearest Louisa's face, the sound of her voice, the pressure of her hand, did more than any medical stimulant to restore her; but her nerves were still completely overpowered. She was hysterical, and repeatedly fainted from

exhaustion and over-excitement; and Doctor Goer's face was grave enough as he felt her fluttering pulse.

She stretched out her hands to Louisa, as if longing to embrace her, but the physician urgently recommended her to be kept as quiet as possible, while he drew from his travelling medical case a bottle of stimulant medicine, as a cordial to her body.

"She cannot be removed to-night," said the doctor.

"Oh! take me away—take me away," faintly cried Caroline. "I shall die if you keep me any longer in this awful house."

"My dear Miss Mildmaye," said the doctor, "I entreat of you to be calm——"

But while he was speaking, horrifying shrieks from Lady Rockforest rang along the corridor, and were heard in every room. How Caroline shuddered and quailed beneath their familiar sounds! She was

seized with convulsions, and Doctor Goer was in trepidation as he saw his patient quivering, while scream after scream rang from Lady Rockforest.

"Let her ladyship be removed from the house at once," said Doctor Goer, addressing himself to his sister.

And Miss Goer went rapidly to give the necessary orders. When she reached the old blue drawing-room in which Eustace Mildmaye had once been confined, what a spectacle met her eye! In language which we cannot copy, the wretched, and it is only charity to suppose half-crazed, peeress was uttering imprecations of a horrible character on Sir Vaughan Gwynne, and Henry Wilmot, and on the Mildmayes. She was at the end of the room, and there was no one near her, though several of the men from Highford Farm were spectators of the scene, and looked on, awe-struck at the sight of the being of whom they had often heard so many strange tales.

"Yes! yes! yes!" she shrieked out, "that vile parson has betrayed my secret —curses on him here and hereafter, and curses on——"

But her cough seized her before she could utter another word; her articulation suddenly was choked, her countenance became ghastly pale, a deep gurgling noise was heard, her figure shook, and the wretched woman fell forward on her face and hands, while a torrent of blood burst from her mouth. She had broken a large artery, and with curses upon her lips, her spirit had gone into the presence of the Most High!

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In the afternoon the rumbling of carriage-wheels was heard along the deserted avenue which led from the high-road up to Catesby Court. When it arrived at the house, Sir Vaughan Gwynne

eagerly advanced, and opened the door of the carriage.

"Oh, Sir Vaughan! how is my dear Caroline? Is she safe? Is she well?" cried Mrs. St. Pierre. "Lead me to her at once."

"Not now," said Sir Vaughan, "for, thank God, she is asleep, and not a noise must be made in her room. Her sister is with her, and the doctor says all depends now on tranquillity of slumber. But I am so glad that you came. The sight of you will do her such good in the morning."

That night was a strange one in old Catesby Court. Often did the ponderous old iron gate swing upon its hinges to admit messengers of various kinds. The news of what had taken place spread with astonishing rapidity, and several country gentlemen went themselves to inquire into the reality of what had happened. Mrs.

Ullathorne, her son John, the servant Hawkins, and one or two underlings, were all taken into custody, as having been engaged in the abduction, and the clerks of three county magistrates had ample work for their pens upon that night.

Mr. Denham had accompanied Mrs. St. Pierre, and he listened with intense interest to the facts of the case which were to be deposed to on the next day at the coroner's inquest.

It was a striking sight to see the dreary old house that night, and to look at the number of strange figures flitting to and fro along its corridors, and examining its deserted chambers. It was with awe that many of the apartments were looked upon. Their decaying furniture, their old style of ornaments, their fading pictures and tattered carpets, had something inexpressibly mournful, and the knowledge of the events that had occurred in the last few hours,

combined with the legendary traditions of the mansion to make it still more affecting to the imaginations of all the visitors within its walls.

The events of the day furnished ample theme for discussion to all the sojourners in that old mansion; but amongst them all there was not one who listened with more eagerness to the narratives than Louisa Mildmaye. She had been completely bewildered with seeing her sister Caroline restored to her vision in Catesby Court, after having, with others, supposed that Caroline had been drowned in the river M——, from which she conceived that she had seen her body taken up just at the time when Lord Rockforest encountered her on his passage from London to Catesby Court. She remembered, also, the clothes of Caroline having been found on the river bank, and she was extremely puzzled, not to say confounded, as to how such circum-

stances, apparently so contradictory, had occurred.

But the wife of the steward at Mr. Denham's cottage at Highford Reach explained matters on that point. The body that was taken from the river was the corpse of a luckless girl, the daughter of an old servant in Dryford, to whom Caroline had been kind, and to whom she had given some of her cast-off apparel. The girl had committed suicide under painful circumstances, and at the time of her drowning herself, she had on her person some of the presents given to her in happier hours, when her life was without stain. She had been for some days absent from her home, and the precise time of her drowning herself had not been exactly ascertained, but her body had been seen floating in the river on the night that Caroline had been taken away.

To relate the conversations that took

place that night, and at the inquest on the two following days, at Catesby Court, would be both tedious and unnecessary, as we should have to repeat facts with which the reader is already familiar; but there were certain parts of the case which were not then made quite clear, in consequence of the deaths of some of the chief actors in the drama, as well as on account of the illness of Eustace Mildmaye, who helplessly lingered for several days without being able to speak. But, as time advanced, and as inquiries were made, these points gradually were cleared up, and after the first excitement caused by the romantic case had passed away, the whole facts of the dark conspiracy became perfectly clear, as shall be shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was about six weeks after the events recorded in the last chapter when Sir Vaughan Gwynne sat down to give an exact recital of the curious drama, in part of which he had been an active agent. The report of the coroner's inquest on the bodies of Lord Rockforest and Lady Rockforest had greatly excited public curiosity, and a variety of accounts, more or less true, had been published in the newspapers. The rank of some of the parties principally concerned had also much added to the general interest, and the ro-

mantic character of some of the incidents had invested the whole case with much of the dignity of a *cause célèbre*.

It was under such circumstances that Sir Vaughan Gwynne was requested by his old friend and college companion, Lord Wentworth, then an *attaché* at the court of Vienna, to give him a close account of some of the particulars in the extraordinary case which had not thoroughly transpired; and we cannot do better than copy some portions of Sir Vaughan's letter, so as to satisfy the curiosity of our readers:

"Albany, London, 14th of December, 183—.

"Last week, my dear Wentworth, I sent you a few hurried lines acknowledging your various letters of inquiry, and I then promised that I would endeavour, at my leisure, to explain to you some of the particulars which have not oozed out in the

newspaper reports. The whole case was certainly of an extraordinary character, and I could write to you a volume about it; but I shall content myself with clearing up those portions of it which you have not been able to understand from the printed accounts in the newspapers. I shall compress my little narrative as much as I can.

"You may have heard that some twenty-five years since, the Honourable Margaret Pendarves was a reigning toast in the days of the Regency, when Brummell's star was still in the ascendant. She married Lord Rockforest, then a worn-out man of pleasure, and the nuptials greatly annoyed Noel Catesby, the younger and only brother of Lord Rockforest. Noel Catesby had married one of the old Catholic family of Fitzstafford, and had a son and two daughters, who inherited from their mother the seeds of that fatal tendency to consumption, which is so common amongst

our Roman Catholic nobility, owing to their pernicious habit of intermarriages. The daughters of Noel Catesby, however, grew up to womanhood, and then withered away, and his son died a soldier's death at Quatre Bras.

"It seems, however, that Noel Catesby and Lady Rockforest were personal enemies. He was angry at his brother, in advanced years and in broken health, marrying a flighty woman of fashion, with great beauty, but with worse than a doubtful share of virtue. He could not conceal his satisfaction at her having a still-born son, and his anxiety when she was again *enceinte* by his brother was palpable to anybody. It was then, certainly, originated the various rumours which for years were flying about London about a *liaison* between Lady Rockforest and Jack Wilmot, the wit—the father of our friend Harry; but whether they were true or false is imma-

terial to inquire, as, unhappily, enough remains to charge against the memory of the unfortunate woman.

"For it seems beyond all doubt, that sooner than that the title of Rockforest, and its accompanying estates, should pass into the hands of Noel Catesby, Lady Rockforest took the most fraudulent means, with the most deliberate art, of opposing the rightful course of law. It appears that one of her waiting-maids was a Mrs. Ullathorne, whose name you must have seen in all the reports of the inquest. This woman was certainly a most remarkable character. She was privy to various episodes in Lady Rockforest's early life, and had acquired great ascendancy over her. A short time before her second confinement, Lady Rockforest met with an accident, and she had again reason to fear for the life of her expected offspring. Mrs. Ullathorne, herself, was near her confine-

ment, and it appears that a secret agreement was made between them, that if Lady Rockforest's child were dead, the son of Mrs. Ullathorne, if it were so, should be substituted in place of her child, in case of an accident.

"What had been foreseen occurred between the parties. Mrs. Ullathorne was confined of a boy about three days before Lady Rockforest's illness. Lord Rockforest, himself, was then in a half-paralysed state, hardly able to be wheeled about his house. The head nurse appointed to attend Lady Rockforest was made ill according to the directions of Mrs. Ullathorne, and by the intervention of a woman of the name of Jenny Barnes (whose attested evidence you may have read), the fraud was accomplished, and with considerable skill."

Here the letter of Sir Vaughan entered

into several minute particulars relating to the death of Lady Rockforest's noble husband, with which it is unnecessary to trouble the reader, but we shall proceed to extract the most interesting portions of his letter. It continued:

"The woman Ullathorne—the prime agent to this wickedness—was a remarkable person. There are some doubts as to what her real name was, but it appears that she was married in the West Indies to a Sergeant Ullathorne, and it seems that her mother was a Spaniard. Her eldest son—the titular Lord Rockforest—inherited, as the whole world is now aware, a most dark, sinister, and vicious disposition from his mother, and the evil seeds of his character were early manifest. He quarrelled with his supposititious mother about her jointure of two thousand a year, and when he found out, as he grew up to

manhood, that he inherited from her a name associated with scandal, and that her life, subsequent to his supposed father's decease, was stained with vice, he treated Lady Rockforest with disdain and contumely, and sought to deprive her of every penny that he legally could; and for a long time he refused to believe in the tale of his birth, communicated to him by Mrs. Ullathorne, whose means were also cut off simultaneously with those of Lady Rockforest.

"It appears, when the younger Ullathorne was informed confidentially by his mother of the true state of affairs, his ambition and expectations became extravagant. Horrible scenes are reported to have taken place between the two brothers; the titular peer defying the claims of the younger Ullathorne, a person of no ordinary gravity, and the latter eternally dunning for hush-money, in which he was supported by his mother.

"In the mean while, Lady Rockforest, as you are aware, lived at Catesby Court. Her life was one of great wretchedness, and the newspapers are correct in their anecdotes about the spy-servants whom she employed to get intelligence of what was going on in families. By the acknowledgment of one of them (Crowder), it appears that the unhappy peeress took a morbid delight, also, in giving pain to several families, by writing to them anonymous letters, in which the most accurate knowledge of their domestic concerns was shown.

"Her life passed in that way until one night she was seized with violent illness at Dryford; and it happened that Mrs. Ullathorne and her son had gone to London to try to bring Lord Rockforest to come to a liberal settlement of their claims upon him. The late Reverend Eustace Mildmaye was brought to her in the middle of

the night, or rather very early on the Sunday morning; and in a state of fear and agitation Lady Rockforest then and there revealed to him the secret crime of which she had been guilty.

"During the first attacks of his illness, Mr. Mildmaye made a brief note of what passed between them at the time; but it is not necessary, after what I have already told you, and after what you have read in the newspapers, that I should further detail it to you. It seems, however, that when the Ullathornes, and Lord Rockforest, found out by Lady Rockforest's confession that the young clergyman knew their secret, they became enraged, and resolved to extract some awfully solemn pledge from him that he never would reveal the secret. There are some suspicions, even, that the Ullathornes at one time had resolved on having him murdered, and therefore (there are some facts to support

that view) I shall not at present decisively pronounce upon it; but I believe that the Ullathornes were capable of any wickedness.

"It is one of the most interesting facts in this drama, that Mr. Mildmaye, as a clergyman, entertained what are called "high" notions about the priestly office. His views upon the sacredness of confession approached very nearly, if they were not identical with, those of the Church of Rome. He resolved, according to his own statement, never to divulge to any one what Lady Rockforest had told him, though, as a clergyman, he had urged her in vain to proclaim the whole truth. He was a man of literary talents, and an elegant scholar, but he had a weak and wavering nature, inherited from his mother, in whose family there was melancholy madness. He had finally resolved to explain the whole case to his cousin—Miss Caro-

line Mildmaye—when his own seizure by paralysis, and her extraordinary abduction, took place, which rendered his intentions of no avail.

"His conduct, unhappily, is much to be blamed. But his error arose partly from a sincere, though erroneous, conviction about the sacredness of a confession, though he was mistaken as to those cases in which a crime against the law is committed, and partly, also, from the nervous weakness of his physical temperament. It seems, however, certain, that when he learned that the supposed Lord Rockforest was going to be married to his cousin, Miss Louisa Mildmaye, that the young clergyman resolved to declare the true state of the case at any risk to himself.

"Nor should it be forgotten, that at the time when the revelation of Lady Rockforest's guilt was made to him, *that nobody then seemed to be an actual sufferer from the fraud.* Noel Catesby and his

daughters were no more, and the lineal and collateral heirs to the house of Catesby were dead. At the present time it is not known who are the heirs-at-law to the property, for the peerage, of course, is extinct. Such considerations greatly diminish the blame to be imputed to Mr. Mildmaye. Nor does it appear, from his own account, that he had any knowledge at all of the dark fact that the coffin of Mrs. Mildmaye had been taken to Catesby Court. It is now clearly ascertained, that, to gratify the fearful vindictiveness of Lady Rockforest, the grave of her old enemy had been outraged; and dreadful are the revelations made of the fiendish and half-crazed delight with which the unfortunate and miserable peeress used to scream forth her maledictions, while pacing the gloomy mausoleum in which she beheld the coffin of the lady whom she had herself hurried to her grave.

"It appears, that when the peeress learned from the lips of the spy-servant in the clergyman's cottage that he was going to reveal the secret to his cousin Caroline, that Lady Rockforest got wild with mingled emotions of rage and fear. Just at that moment John Ullathorne could extract no money from the perverse and violent person who passed for Lord Rockforest. He believed that he could keep Lord Rockforest further in his power if he married by violence the sister of the lady to whom Lord Rockforest was affianced. They would be brothers, married to two sisters, each in the power of the other; and he expected that even if the secret were communicated to the Mildmayes, that for selfish reasons they would be silent upon it. Only half educated, habitually desperate, and foolishly ambitious, the scheme of John Ullathorne was just one of those frantic plans, with a mixture of knavish art and practical

folly, that abound in the annals of criminal life.

"But very different was the purpose of Lady Rockforest in urging on the abduction of Miss Caroline Mildmaye. Her passions had been inflamed into frenzy at the idea of the false Lord Rockforest profiting by her own crime, and then making a peeress of the younger daughter of her hated enemy! You can suppose how eagerly such a woman, in such a situation, clutched at the proposition of John Ullathorne. If she could not prevent the marriage of Lord Rockforest, at least she could insult it by the scandal of the abduction; and Mrs. Ullathorne fancied, that if matters had gone as *she* designed, that the friends of the young lady would have hushed up the whole case, rather than injure her by such a horrible exposure. Ungovernable passion, intense revenge, and frenzied designs actuated Lady Rockforest; and you can imagine what the sensations

of such a person must have been on seeing one of the Mildmayes becoming a peeress through her own crime. And when the fact is recollected that Lord Rockforest was her personal foe at the time, and trying to defraud her of her legal position (though *he* had so benefited by her criminality), her conduct in that point of view will seem to have exhibited some of the peculiar method proverbially visible in mad and half-mad people.

"Lord Rockforest appears to have been quite astounded when first the intelligence was revealed to him by his real mother that he was not a true peer. He was a young man of coarse character, and with hardihood of temperament, varnished over with a deceitful mannerism that was spuriously specious. He played his part in society with considerable address. He had fine eyes, a bold, imposing presence, and with his air of authority and great personal strength, along with his title and

fortune, he passed upon the town, for a time, with no small effect. The degrading habits to which he was accustomed, and the wretched associates with whom he was connected, have been truly reported by the newspapers. He was in all respects a most wicked character; and although no one was aware of it at the time, Lord Rockforest suffered tortures from the circumstance of his own brother, John Ullathorne, having told one of his old confederates the real state of the case as regarded Lord Rockforest's false title and fraudulent fortune. Hence repeated demands for hush-money! Hence threats, and partial revelations, and degrading personal quarrels, and endless concessions of extorted money. The London gang of wretches worked hard upon their prey, and the unfortunate creature had a miserable time of it.

"It would seem that at the last moment, when the police-office disclosures

were yawning before him like an abyss, that he grasped at the union with Miss Louisa Mildmaye, trusting that by his matrimonial connexion with the St. Pierre family that he would be protected and upheld, and that he should be enabled to tide over the difficulties. It is a curious fact, that the more desperate became his prospects, the more vicious became his habits. But in such characters vice is a sort of mental disease in some of its phases.

"The journals have truly recorded the particulars relative to Jenny Barnes's disclosures to Harry Wilmot of the fraud in which she had been a participator. It was not the least romantic circumstance in this singular story, that Wilmot should have come to town at the time when the abduction had been partly effected. The illness of Eustace Mildmaye, and the consequent visit of Mrs. St. Pierre to his cottage, along with the young clergyman's announcement

of his having a secret in his possession, were amongst those extraordinary features in the whole case which shows us that there is often a Providence in events. On thinking of such a singular dispensation of fortuitous circumstances, I often call to mind the words of the great poet of human nature—

> 'There's a divinity which shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we may.'

"The corroborative testimony of the surgeon, Colletts, who attended Lady Rockforest in childbirth, and who was privy to the fraud, was of great use in establishing the truth of the statement made by Jenny Barnes. The surgeon, though well paid for holding his tongue, shortly before his death communicated his knowledge of the facts to his own son, an Old Bailey attorney of the lowest character; and this latter person was one of the people who tormented the titular Lord Rockforest with threats of exposure."

Then, after various references to particulars of the tale already in possession of the reader, the letter proceeded:

"But, my dear Wentworth, as to how I speed in my wooing with Caroline Mildmaye, I beg you not to torture me. You are aware that I proposed for her long since, and that she rejected me, after a precipitate courtship on my part. Since the occurrence of the extraordinary incidents in which I chanced to play a part which was of considerable service to her, I have refrained, from motives of delicacy, in urging my suit. I may, however, say this to you, that if Caroline Mildmaye will not be my bride, I shall never marry any one else."

And then the letter went on to discuss topics interesting only to those concerned in politics of twenty years ago.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLEASANT sight was to be seen one fine day in the following autumn at Boxgrove, the former seat of Mr. George Mildmaye. The place looked joyous and cheerful; it had been purchased by Mr. St. Pierre, and given by him as a present to "the rival sisters." Its walks and gardens were all in perfect order; the lawn was smooth shaven; the swans floated on the quaint square fishpond; and the old-fashioned house itself was trimly neat, and in the best repair. The very birds seemed to rejoice in the pleasant fact that Boxgrove was again tenanted by old friends, and

they made the groves rejoice with their sweet melody.

Outside the hall-door, seated in a garden-chair, was Mr. St. Pierre himself. He was looking happy and cheerful, though in his customary weak health. Standing by his chair was Louisa Wilmot (for that was her new name), listening with affectionate respect to the old gentleman's fading recollections of other times, and manifesting interest in the glimmering lights of the invalid's memory.

Mrs. St. Pierre was engaged in reading a letter to Henry Wilmot, and they were both laughing heartily at its contents.

"What can they be laughing at so much?" said Mr. St. Pierre.

"Do," said Louisa Wilmot, "give us the benefit of the mirthful matter that amuses you so much."

"Oh!" said Mrs. St. Pierre, "Fanny Baskervyll is changed in nothing but her

name. She is the same Fanny Bunbury as ever. Poor Daddy Dryasdust gets as many hard knocks as ever from her."

"She's an extraordinary creature," said Mrs. Wilmot; "but do tell us what ludicrous things fill her last letter."

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "how could I read before dinner such a long letter as that." And she pointed to several pages of note-paper, scrawled over by Fanny Baskervyll's facile pen.

"Well, after dinner," said Mr. St. Pierre, "when our dearest Caroline is here, we shall have the whole letter read."

"But let us have the postscript read now," said Henry Wilmot. "You know that the pith of a lady's letter is in the postscript."

"Well, shall I read it?" asked Mrs. St. Pierre.

"Oh! by all means," cried Mr. St. Pierre and Louisa Wilmot.

"But," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "the postscript is marked 'most private.'"

"That is in the Baskervyll understanding of the term—for our dear five hundred friends in particular," said Louisa Wilmot. "Pray give us the postscript."

"Well, here it is," said Mrs. St. Pierre. And she read aloud as follows:

"P.S.—I may mention to you *in strict confidence* that my dear Baskey has for a long time been poring over manuscripts and old records, containing several musty old pedigrees. He found out some time ago that the title of 'Rockforest' was what is called 'a writ of right peerage,' of the meaning of which I am not quite certain, but it seems that, unlike other peerages, it can descend through the female side. Mr. Baskervyll found out that an ancestor of Sir Vaughan Gwynne's mother had changed his name from 'Catesby' to Tollemache, and that, in point of fact, the

mother of Sir Vaughan Gwynne was one of the heirs to the title of 'Rockforest,' on the supposition that no male claimant should appear. So that there is a chance, perhaps a certainty, that my dearest, sweetest Caroline—if ever she marry Sir Vaughan—will yet be 'Lady Rockforest.' But in this strange world there is never knowing what follows. Providence, in its infinite mercies——"

"Ah! stop there, I beg," cried Mr. St. Pierre. "I adore Providence, but Mrs. Baskervyll's mode of bringing it in is downright profane."

"But could the news be true that Sir Vaughan is heir-in-law to the title of Rockforest?" said Louisa.

"There is no reason why he should not, on the assumption that Mr. Baskervyll's facts are true."

"Oh! but," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "'tis in facts that he is strong; but I fear that

if Sir Vaughan were proclaimed heir to a dukedom, it would make no difference in my sweet Caroline's sentiments towards Sir Vaughan. It was only on this morning that he told me that she had not yet said the word to him."

"Ah! but she will say it before long," said Mr. St. Pierre.

"I hope so, I am sure," said Wilmot, "for Sir Vaughan's sake."

"And I hope so," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "for my own Caroline's sake. I am sure that she will never be so happy with any one else. I wish that she would put him out of pain."

"Ah!" said Louisa Wilmot, "poor Eustace's memory deserves some regard."

"Yes, it does," said Mr. St. Pierre; "but so also do the services of Sir Vaughan at a moment of infinite peril."

"Indeed they do," said Mrs. St. Pierre; "but what a time they are both away.

They said that they would be here by five o'clock, and it is just now six."

"There they are," said Louisa, looking to a distant part of the lawn, where, emerging from a thicket, Sir Vaughan and Caroline were walking across the sward, instead of coming round by the avenue.

The eyes of the group before the hall-door turned eagerly upon them. They were talking together, and their pace was very slow.

"Ah! Caroline is leaning on Sir Vaughan," said Mrs. St. Pierre; "that's a good sign. Oh! how I trust that she has said the word."

"Perhaps," said Louisa Wilmot, "she is fatigued."

"They are talking together very earnestly," said Wilmot. "Now they see us looking at them, and Caroline has not withdrawn her arm."

And nearer and nearer came the pair so anxiously regarded by the group outside the door at Boxgrove. Now they were very close, and Sir Vaughan broke silence by asking,

"I hope you will forgive us for keeping you waiting for dinner so long? But we stayed such a time to see the new school at Milverton."

And Caroline then withdrew her arm, and came forward to the group. Her complexion was greatly heightened, and she looked charmingly. Yet she was not the equal in looks of that Caroline Mildmaye whom our readers had made acquaintance with about two years before. Her face was sterner, and there was a slightly depressed look about her countenance. The grey hair gave her face an old look, which detracted from her beauty, and gave a strangeness to her aspect. Yet she would not have recourse to the arti-

fices of the toilette to hide its injurious effects. She wore her hair just as it was, the badge of her suffering, and the mark of the unexpected mental misery which she had endured. There had been always great sweetness in her face, and there was now a pensiveness which added irresistibly to the pathos of her expression. Even though still wearing a certain air of languor and bodily fatigue, she was very charming, and in some respects her appearance was more interesting than before.

"We are late, certainly," said Sir Vaughan; "but we crave pardon, and we hope that you will forgive us."

"Your pardon is granted," said Mrs. St. Pierre. "Your walk appears to have agreed with you."

"Ah! that it did," said Sir Vaughan. And he laughed heartily, and seemed vastly pleased.

But Caroline, with a flushed counte-

nance, and a slight appearance of agitation, passed rapidly into the house. She did not do so without giving one of those mysterious signals with the eyes which women have an art in doing.

"Tell Louisa to come here," said Caroline, when Mrs. St. Pierre followed her up-stairs.

And in a few minutes Louisa Wilmot and Mrs. St. Pierre were in Caroline's dressing-room. Her manner was agitated as she spoke.

"I have said the word;—I have said the irrevocable word."

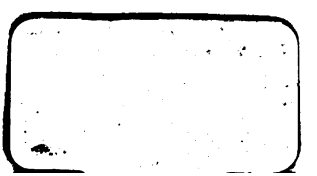
"God bless you, my darling sister," cried Louisa Wilmot, throwing herself on Caroline's neck.

"My dearest wishes are now realised," said Mrs. St. Pierre, affectionately embracing Caroline. "You and Sir Vaughan will be the happiest couple in the world."

"God grant it!" murmured Caroline,

while her overstrung heart relieved itself by tears.

"Kind Heaven will grant it," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "and thus repay the innocent in suffering for the perils sometimes attendant upon a 'Clergyman's Secret.'"

THE END.

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